

# In The Face of The Enemy

by Canister

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Summary: Marines stationed on an isolated planet, left for dead by their superiors struggle to stay alive in the face of a Covenant onslaught.

## 1. Chapter 1: Welcome to Nyko

Welcome to Nyko

Camp Eagle

PFC. John Cussler awoke just before the morning reveille. Cussler groaned and climbed down off his top cot, scratching his head of dark brown hair. "Just another morning on planet Nyko," he thought to himself. Wake-up at 0600hrs, morning PT until 0730hrs and then breakfast at 0800.

Two hours and a hundred push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, and a 3-mile run later he John was sitting in the mess hall looking at the so-called food dumped onto his tray. The only thing that looked edible was the two slices of bread resting on top. "This is bullshit," he muttered as he poked at it.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you not to play with your food," Tommy Dixon told him moving around the table and sitting down across from him. Like himself, Dixon was also a PFC.

"Look at this, what is it?"

"Does it matter, you ain't got to eat it," L/Cpl. Michael Fraizer, his fire team leader, said coming down beside him.

John slowly began to eat.

A Marine sat down at the end of the table and began to eat. The trio stared at him. He noticed their shoulder patches. That and the tattoo are their arms showed who they were. The Marine quickly got up and

left.

"Oh that was cold," PFC Jessica Grover said joining them, seeing what they did. "So what is this so called food?"

"See," Cussler said louder than he wanted.

"Shut it," Fraizer growled.

"What seems to be the problem here?" Sergeant Edwards, the squad leader, asked coming over to them.

"Just the usual bitching Sarge," Fraizer replied.

"The food again, ey?"

The three privates nodded.

"Ya it's to bad they cant make a meal everyday like they do at Christmas. Oh well what can you do?"

"Grab our M5s and force them to eat it," Cussler muttered. Dixon grinned.

PFCs Alyssa Cole and Tim Gierlowski sat down next to them. Gierlowski was different from everybody else, he was a Mormon. Everyone thought he was strange because he didn't curse, didn't drink, didn't gamble, didn't complain and wasn't out to sleep with every women. When the Covenant attacked, he felt it his duty to enlist.

"How can you eat that shit and not complain Tim?"

"If the good lord provides it then we should be kind enough to eat it." Seeing that it

didn't satisfy him he continued. "This stuff was food at one time, the cooks just can't cook."

"So you're saying we should pray for some new cooks."

"I agree, you should," Tim said grinning.

"Good Morning men," Lt. DiSopa announced as sat down next to Fraizer. "Are we enjoying ourselves today?"

"As much as we can, el-tee" Cussler replied.

"Can it smart ass," Fraizer told him.

"It's alright Fraizer. They're having eggs and bacon over at division headquarters, but I figured I'd come and eat this M5"

"Shit, sir" Dixon finished.

"M5 with you men."

"El-tee, believe me we wouldn't have thought any less of you if you would've went," Cussler told him. "At least you would've gotten to eat."

\* \* \*

>Division Headquarters <p>Camp Eagle<p>

0903hrs

Brigadier General Kirkus, commander of the 147th Marine Division sighed and pushed his empty plate away. An orderly picked it up and disappeared into another room. Kirkus was the commander of Camp Eagle, the Marine base housed the 20,000 men of the 147th Marine Division.

"So gentlemen what is our current situation?"

"General, the men are getting lazy, we gotta have more exercises," Col. Reynolds, commander of the 82nd Regiment pointed out.

"I concur sir," the commander of the 24th Regiment, Col. Jones said.

"Same," Colonel Nadal of the 54th told him.

"Sir my men are slipping into the routine also, if something should happen, that could be a problem," Major Jackson, commander of the attached 2nd Battalion, 105th ODSs announced.

"I agree General, I'm beginning to see it in my men as well," Sergeant Major Hazner commander of the division's Recon platoon agreed.

"Captain Perry status of your men?"

"Same General," Captain Perry, commander of the division's air support added.

"Same thing here as well sir," Captain Robinson, commander of the divisions ground support said.

"Ok start performing emergency air raids and deployment drills and increase the live fire testing."

"Yes sir," the group chorused.

"As you know we have not received any orders and transmissions from Reach since we lost contact with the Sensing Station Fermion last month. If we do not receive our resupply ships we may face a problem."

"Sir we have a year's supply of food and water here," Major Jackson pointed out.

"Yes but what about ammo, ordnance and fuel for the ground and air vehicles, clothes, small arms munitions."

"The Remington does have extra supplies for us if needed," Perry announced.

Kirkus stood and faced the window staring at his men shuffling about.

"Gentlemen I think that maybe we should presume that Reach has been attacked and glassed."

"Sir," Perry chuckled. "Reach has twenty orbital MAC guns, along with a major fleet. They would surely decimate any Covenant fleet."

"Then why haven't we had contact with them."

"Maybe the Sensing Station was destroyed?" Jackson pointed out.

"Possibly," Kirkus mumbled still looking out the window.

"Sir may I suggest something?" Hazner asked.

"Go ahead."

"Maybe we send the Remington to Reach to recon?"

Kirkus turned and sat back down. "Ok, Captain Perry, notify the Remington. They are to jump to Reach and see why we haven't received any orders. If they sense a bit of trouble they are to get out and report back to us."

"Yes sir." Perry stood, saluted, and left.

\* \* \*

>Delta Company Barracks <p>Camp Eagle<p>

0100hrs

Cussler took another sip from his beer.

"John, she's checking you out again," Dixon told him nodding to the woman at the end of the bar.

Cussler turned to his left, a pretty woman with blond hair smiled at him. He smiled back. She stood and began to walk towards him.

"Good luck man," Dixon whispered and went to sit with the rest of the squad.

"Hi," the women said. "May I sit here?"

"Sure," Cussler told her. She sat down, slowly crossing her legs and smiled at him again.

"May I buy you a drink?" he asked.

Just then a siren blared outside the bar.

"What is that?" he muttered, looking at the door.

"Get your sorry ass up Cussler!" the woman's voice told him.

He turned back to the woman. She was gone.

"Whatâ€¦?"

"I said, get your sorry ass up!"

Cussler's eyes jerked open and he rolled out of his top cot, slamming onto the concrete floor. Edwards hauled him to his feet.

"We're under attack, weapons and ammo!" he shouted.

Cussler threw his boots on grabbed his vest and BR55 and followed the panicked line out the door.

"\_All personnel, Covenant forces are inbound. Man you positions!"\_ a voice blared over the loudspeaker.

The base was in chaos. Marines were running about, scrambling to get weapons and ammo. Spotlights crisscrossed across the night sky. In the towers men were loading ammo into their M247s. A Skyhawk was scrambling at the airfield in the distance and several Pelicans gunships were preparing to lift off, men rushing to get in, the pilots lifting off, Marines falling out the back. Tankers were running for their tanks, the Scorpions rumbling to life. One crushing the front of a Warthog as it pulled out its spot. John was near the trench when a pair of Warthogs thundered past, horns blazing, spraying mud all over them. He caught a glimpse of a gunner flying out the back. Several men running over to him.

Cussler jumped down into the perimeter trench and raked the charging handle on his "55. Dixon came down next to him, slamming a mag into his battle rifle.

"What the hell?" he shouted. Cussler shrugged.

Fraizer came running up the trench towards them, gripping his M7 submachine gun in his right hand and a M41 rocket launcher in his left, Grover following him.

"Cussler here," Fraizer said tossing him the launcher.

"Stay alert men, keep watching the wire, if you see an ugly multicolored mother-fucker put two in his chest and one in his eyes," Staff Sergeant Edwards shouted moving down along the trench, feeding shells into his M90.

"Mike?" somebody shouted.

"Over here!" Fraizer replied.

Cpl. Justin Acker jumped down into the trench, his fire team following.

"Cole, scan the wire," he ordered.

"Yes Corporal," Alyssa replied. She flipped down the bipod on her M99SRS and activated the night scope.

"\_Attention all personnel, attention all personnel. This has been an Emergency Attack Drill. All personnel are to stand down."\_

"What the fuck!" Cussler shouted spinning to look at the loudspeaker, as if it'll give him the answer.

"Dammit Cuss," Fraizer yelled at him. "Watch where you're swinging that damned thing."

John slung the M41 over his shoulder and safed his battle rifle.

"Come on, let's get some sleep," Edwards told them. "They'll be hell to pay, tomorrow."

\* \* \*

>Delta Company Barracks <p>Camp Eagle<p>

0755hrs

"THAT WAS THE SORRIEST DISPLAY OF SOLDIERING I HAVE EVER SEEN!" Gunnery Sergeant Sykes screamed as he thundered down the aisle. "And you call your sorry asses Marines!"

Gunny stopped and picked up a footlocker. He slammed it against a wall. Sykes had been screaming at them for the past 5 minutes.

"Three men are dead and dozens in the hospital," Sykes growled. "You're a bigger threat to each other than you are to the damn Covenant!"

Sykes glared at them.

"There's going to be a regimental exercise two days from now. You better get your fucking acts together before then or I'm going to skin every man in this goddamn platoon!"

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him. The whole barracks shook.

Cussler exhaled feeling his ass to make sure there was something left.

"Come on Cuss," Dixon said walking past. "Lets get some coffee before he decides to come back."

\* \* \*

>UNSC Destroyer Remington <p>In orbit over Nyko<p>

Captain Doherty stepped onto the bridge, returning the salutes of his bridge officers as he moved to his seat as Commander Ford came up to him.

"Captain," Ford said saluting.

"XO."

"Lieutenant Bedlow lets prepare to jump," he told the officer that manned Navigation.

"Aye Captain," Bedlow replied.

Doherty sighed and leaned back in his seat. The Remington was old,

one of the many outdated vessels pressed back into service. But it was still a destroyer, which meant it could take and dish out a lot of damage. Two MAC guns, twenty-six oversized Archer pods, and three Shiva nukes. Unfortunately the ship had no AI.

"It would be nice to see Reach again," he thought to himself.

"Captain!" Lieutenant Rio, manning Ops, called out. "Slipspace rupture to our stern!"

"What?"

"Profile matches that of a Covenant Frigate."

"Cancel the jump, bring us about course one niner zero, ready the MAC guns."

The bridge officers snapped to and furiously began to work.

"Lieutenant Rio sound general quarters."

"Aye sir."

Red lights began to flash followed by a siren. The bridge doors sealed shut, the doors locking.

"Covenant ship entering normal space," Bedlow announced.

On the view screen the space in front of them boiled green. A Covenant Frigate emerged from Slipspace. The sleek, whale-like Frigate appeared on the screen.

"Lieutenant Stenson, get us a firing solution."

"Aye sir, MAC guns are still hot."

Red molts of light appeared along the frigate.

"They're getting ready to fire Captain."

The red glow became one solid band.

"Keep moving at this speed Lieutenant Bedlow."

"Aye sir, reactors are at one hundred percent."

"Push them to one-fifty!"

"Aye, Aye Captain," Bedlow replied. "Meltdown in one minute."

"Firing solution is online sir," Stenson announced. "Ready to fire."

"Fire!"

Two thumps echoed throughout the Remington. On the view screen two white lines streaked towards the Covenant frigate. The Covenant ship

fired as well.

"Hold this course."

"Aye sir," Bedlow replied.

"MAC round striking in 5," Rio announced. "4â€|3â€|2â€|1."

The frigate's shield flickered and died as the first MAC round struck it. The second impacted punching a hole just in front of the ship's engines.

"Sir plasma collision in ten seconds!"

"Emergency thrusters to port, then gives us one hundred percent!"

A loud bang echoed throughout the ship. Doherty gripped his command chair tightly as the Remington rolled.

"Arm Archer pods A through D, load the MAC guns, one heavy round apiece."

"Aye, aye Captain!"

"Lieutenant Rio, show aft cameras."

Two plasma torpedoes appeared on the screen, they slowly turned and continued tracking them.

"Sir, they're preparing to fire again!" Rio called out.

"MAC guns charging," Stenson told him. "Fully charged in ten seconds."

"Sir, Covenant ship is preparing to jump."

The space in front of the frigate began to twist, green lights appearing on its bow.

"Fire the cannons!" Doherty shouted.

"Sir, without a firingâ€|"

"We cannot let them jump!" Doherty cut him off. "Fire the cannons."

"Aye Captain."

Two streaks if rocketed towards the Covenant Frigate. The Covenant ship fired again. Two more bolts of plasma began towards the Remington. Then it was gone.

"Covenant ship has jumped sir," Rio announced. "Four plasma torpedoes tracking us."

Doherty bald his hand into a fist. The view screen showed empty space.

"Bring us in high orbit around Nyko, the planet's gravity should pull in the plasma."



"Yes Captain," Bedlow replied.

"Rio, contact Camp Eagle," Doherty ordered. "Tell them we engaged a Covenant Frigate, damaged it but it has fled. Tell them to expect an attack soon. I'll come down to meet with the General later today."

\* \* \*

>Division Headquarters <p>Camp Eagle<p>

0911hrs

"Then it jumped sir," Doherty finished.

"You suspect the more will be coming?" Kirkus asked.

"No, sir I know that more will be coming," Doherty replied. "It'll be just like Sigma Octanus IV, they know we're here and they'll want to kill us."

Kirkus sighed and bowed his head.

"Doherty send your Marines down hear, along with your Warthogs and Scorpions, we'll need them more."

"Yes sir."

"Then jump to Earth, try and get us some help."

"I understand sir, good luck."

Doherty stood, saluted and left.

"Lieutenant," Kirkus told his aide. "Get Colonels Reynolds, Nadal, and Jones here now."

Five minutes later the three Colonels entered his office.

"Gentlemen we may have a problem," he told them. "The Remington engaged a Covenant Frigate this morning. It fled before it could be destroyed. I believe that we should expect a full attack before the end of the week."

The trio stood silent.

"I'm sending the Remington back to Earth to try and get us support. I want you to put listening posts around the base, nearby cities, and any nearby areas that would make a good staging area. Put the base on fifty percent alert and keep it that way until we get attacked or Doherty comes back with a fleet."

"Sir, maybe we should consider evacuating," Jones suggested.

"Pack twenty thousand men on the Remington and abandoned our equipment and five million civilians?"

Jones found it better not to reply.

"Reynolds and Nadal, I want you to move your men outta the Camp and

into the surrounding hills. If we get attacked I don't want to lose every regiment. Also tell Jackson and Hazner to move their men outta the base also.

\* \* \*

>Delta Company Barracks<p><p>

Camp Eagle

1545hrs

"Listen up men," Gunny Sykes announced. "I got something important to tell you."

Cussler sat on the edge of his cot, his BR55 next to him. Word has spread throughout the base fast that the Remington engaged a Covenant ship. From what they heard, when the Covenant start something they see it through to the end or die trying.

"The UNSC Remington, earlier today, engaged a Covenant frigate," Sykes told them. "It fled before it could be destroyed. The General is sending the Remington to Earth to try and get us support. The battalion is moving. We're moving to the old fort, we've used for training purposes. The 24th will hold the base. The rest of us are moving."

"Gunny what about Reach?" Grover asked.

"If the Covenant found us then they found Reach. I want you all to get as much gear as you can into a duffel and load it into you assigned Warthogs. Then armor up and stuff all the ammo you can carry into pockets, pouches, bags, whatever can hold it. Be packed and ready to move by this evening."

Sykes left them in silence.

"Alright ladies, you heard the gunny," Edwards told them standing up.

Cussler jumped up off his cot and moved to his locker. He stuffed his extra pair of camo BDUs, socks, and a cover inside. He grabbed other assorted gear. He zipped up the bag and closed his locker heading for the door.

"Everybody get their armor on now," Edwards ordered.

Cussler sighed and reopened his locker.

\* \* \*

>UNSC High Command Facility Bravo-6 <p>Earth<p>

2 days later

"Captain Doherty, UNSC Remington, reporting sir."

Doherty saluted Admiral Hood, General Strauss, Colonel Ackerson, and the half dozen other men in the room.

"Please proceed Captain," the Admiral told him.

"Sir, my destroyer was providing support for the Marines down on Nyko," Doherty began. "Two days ago a Covenant frigate jumped in-system. He engaged it and damaged it, but it fled before we could finish it off. General Kirkus ordered me to report back here and request reinforcements."

"General Strauss, how many of our people are on Nyko?" Hood asked.

Strauss hesitated for a moment checking a book on the desk.

"Twenty thousand UNSC personnel and five million civilians," he told Hood.

"General would it be possible to evacuate?"

"Sir with all due respect," Ackerson cut in. "Five million is a small price to pay. We lost an entire fleet at Reach and thousands of Marines. Our remaining ships should be pulled back to protect the inner colonies."

"Colonel we have twenty thousand men on Nyko," Doherty told him.

"How do you know the Covenant haven't already glassed the planet Captain?" Ackerson snapped.

Doherty said nothing staring straight ahead.

"We do not know they are dead Colonel," Hood interjected calmly.

"They will be soon," Ackerson countered.

"Captain could you please leave us for a moment, we'll get back to you," Strauss told him.

Doherty saluted, spun on his heels and walked out, taking in a deep breath. He sat down on the couch outside and stared at the ceiling. It felt like an hour until the MP told him they were ready.

Doherty quickly stood and reentered the room.

"Captain, we have discussed the situation and that attempting to rescue our men would be impossible," Admiral Hood told him. "It would take more ships than we have available at this time and the fact is that you don't know if they are alive still. I'm sorry Captain, I know you had friends down on the planet."

Doherty stood silent, a little shocked that they were willing to write off twenty thousand Marines and five million civilians. He slowly saluted and walked out.

A Lieutenant walking towards him saluted as he past, his tag read Wagner. The emblem next to his name showed Naval Intelligence: Section Three.

"Fucking spooks," Doherty thought returning the salute.

He entered the elevator and several minutes later stepped out into fresh air.

"Doherty that you?" someone asked from behind.

"Closson, you son-of-a-bitch," Doherty said turning and seeing the face. "How ya doing?"

"Hanging in man," Commander Closson replied. "You?"

"Been better," Doherty replied. "You got some time I need to talk to you?"

"Sure, lets walk."

They slowly began to walk away from HighCom, moving up the street towards a small park.

"So what's up?" Closson asked.

"You still command the Frigate National right?"

"Ya."

"Ok well I'll start from the beginning."

Doherty explained the how he was assigned to Nyko, the quick engagement, and what just happened at Command. By the time he finished they reached the park and sat down on a bench.

"Look can you schedule a training thing or something and come with me to go back to Nyko."

"I don't know James, the Covenant may have glassed the planet already," Closson pointed out.

"Well we'll jump out at the first sign of trouble. We can jump straight there, it'll only take twelve or so hours. We'll be back in two days."

"If you do this you'll lose command of the Remington."

"I'll say that I wanted to make sure nothing got damaged in the fight. If we find something we'll report it. Your on a training exercise remember?"

"I guess," Closson replied hesitantly.

"Thank you I'll owe you for this one."

"You're damn right you will."

Doherty grinned.

"Meet me at the port in an hour."

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Thank you for reading my first chapter. The rest will be along eventually.

## 2. Chapter 2: And So It Begins

**\*\*And So It Begins\*\***

**\*\*DAY 1\*\***

Reaction Force Staging Area

Planet Nyko

1036hrs

"All outposts beware we have lost contact with Outpost Gamma."

Private Scott Damson sat upright upon hearing the transmission through his radio.

"We need a reaction force at their location."

He climbed outta the troop bay and jumped into the passenger seat of his M831 Troop Transport Warthog. Several men from his squad joined him, his squad leader jumped into the driver seat.

"All set?" Sergeant Lobel asked.

"Yes Sergeant."

The other two vehicles in front and back of them started up as well and the three-vehicle convoy set off.

"Where was their last known Sarge?" Damson asked.

"Five klicks west of here."

"They send out any distress signals?"

"None."

They passed through a small patch of woods before starting up a ridge. They crested the ridge, and began down the other side. They could see a large canyon in the distance

"They were stationed along the canyon," Sergeant Lobel shouted. "Lock and load!"

"Helpâ€¦somebodyâ€¦..helpâ€¦this isâ€¦Gamma," a voice cried through the static on the radio. "Madeâ€¦..forces everywhereâ€¦..tanks, lots of â€¦.."

"Gamma do you read?" Damson shouted in the handset. "This is QRF One."

A loud scream broke through the static followed by silence.

He saw the lead Warthogs gunner pull the charging handle on his M41.

"Incoming, one o'clock high!" someone in the back shouted.

Damson looked up and saw a ball of blue plasma coming for them.

Lobel swerved as the mortar round struck behind them.

"Wraiths on the far side."

He spotted several rock like objects hurl more plasma mortars at them.

"Damson get on the radio, we're getting out."

"Command, this is QRF One, we have been engaged by Covenant forces and are pulling out."

A mortar landed next them flipping the Warthog over. Damson was thrown from the vehicle. He groaned and rolled onto his back. Several more mortars streaked across the sky. A pair of hands grabbed him dragged him behind the Warthog.

"We need air support," Lobel was saying.

He picked himself up and grabbed a BR55 lying on the ground. He peered through the site and aimed at a Grunt wildly firing his needler. He let loose a three round burst, satisfied when he saw purple blood squirt from the creature. He was about to fire another burst at a Spectre gunner when the gunner brought his gun around and fired a long burst at them. Five rounds struck his chest, his armor stopping three of them, the other two burning into his skin.

Damson screamed and collapsed, clutching his chest.

"Damson's down!" someone shouted.

"Sarge is hit to!" another voice cried.

A Skyhawk roared overhead.

It circled around running parallel with the canyon. Coming in low it strafed the Covenant forces with its 50mm cannons. Geysers of dirt kicked up as the 50mm bullets chewed through the infantry. Another Skyhawk followed the first doing the same. Two Wraiths exploded, engulfing the Covenant that sheltered near it.

A squadron of Banshees dropped outta the clouds, chasing away the two Skyhawks.

"Damson hang in there!" someone told him. "We got help coming."

"Get that Warthog over here," another shouted.

He was half carried and half dragged to a Warthog and laid next its M41. The gunner leaned over inserting Biofoam into the wound in his chest.

They began to move, plasma streaking above them.

"Shit they're in front of us," the driver cried.

He gunned the accelerator and swerved to the right.

"Hang in there buddy," the gunner told him.

Damson did not reply.

"How's he doing?" the driver asked

"He's gone," the driver replied manning the M41.

\* \* \*

>2105th ODST Staging Area

1310hrs

"Everyone shut up and pay attention," Gunny Sykes shouted, the men quickly quieted down. "Go ahead El-tee." Lieutenant DiSopa stepped up onto the Scorpion.

Cussler leaned quietly against the side of a Warthog, sipping a canteen cup of coffee. Dixon stood next to him, fiddling with the scope of his "55.

"Marines, the Covenant have attacked Havana. We stopped them when they tried to cross the Havana Gorge, which runs right through the city. Now we've been ordered to counter-attack to take the other side."

DiSopa pointed to a holomap displayed next to him.

"There are three bridges that cross the gorge. Each company will assault a bridge and will be supported by six Scorpions and ten Warthogs. D Company will not partake in the attack. "

Many of the men whispered their approval, not wanting to be apart of what seemed to be a suicidal attack.

"I don't know if any of you know this," DiSopa continued. "But the Division's Recon platoon was stationed on the western side of the city. We lost contact with them when the Covenant attacked the city."

Cussler grimaced, knowing where this was going.

"Goddammit," Dixon sighed.

"D Company will be dropped around their last known position. The area is too hot to land the Pelicans so we'll be parachuting in. Recon's last transmission was that they were falling back to the park. The park is in downtown, located here and is our drop zone," DiSopa told them pointing to the map. "We will have Skyhawk jump jets and Pelican gunships for support and Scorpions and Warthogs when they become available. It is estimated that we will only be cut off for one to two hours."

"Everyone pick up your chutes and move to your assigned Pelicans and I'll see you on the ground."

Cussler dumped the rest of his coffee, and stuff the cup into his pack.

"First squad, lets move!" Sergeant Edwards ordered.

John fell in with everyone else as they sprinted for their Pelican. The crew chief stood outside handing them their chutes as they entered.

"Lock and load now," Edwards told them, "and try not to shoot yourselves."

Cussler slipped into his chute and took a seat.

"Well this is going to be fun," Dixon said.

The Pelicans engines roared to life and smoothly lifted into the air. He watched out the cargo door as their staging area grew smaller and smaller being replaced by wooded ridges and hills. Two Pelicans dropped in behind them as they rocketed over a ridge and climbed into the air. The Pelicans behind them accelerated and moved to the left and right as the ten Pelican squadron took on a wedge formation.

"Three minutes out," the crew chief shouted.

John unholstered the M6C on his hip, sliding a round into place, and reholstering it. Sergeant Edwards calmly stood next to the door, holding on to hand rail, staring out. Dixon was fiddling with his helmet, whipping a rag across his black helmet and visor before putting it on. It was impossible to tell each other apart from the front. They had their last names written on the back of their helmets, below ODST, but that was it. Cussler was able to pick out the fire team leaders: Fraizer, Acker, and Palmer by their M7s. He was also able to identify Alyssa Cole who carried an M99C sniper.

"One minute."

John sealed his helmet. His ammo and grenade count displayed on the bottom right of his HUD and a motion sensor flashed to life on his bottom left.

His stomach knotted, insertions always made him nervous. Havana appeared below them.

The Pelican jerked hard to the left suddenly.

Dixon was thrown from his seat. John grabbed him by the vest to prevent him from sliding out.

"Were taking AA fire, get ready!" the crew chief shouted.

The dropship shook violently and began to lose altitude.

"We're hit," someone cried.



Alyssa Cole and Cpl. Acker went sliding towards the door. Alyssa managed to grab onto the cargo net next to the door. Acker slid right out.

"Go, go, get outta here," the crew chief screamed.

Cussler jumped to his feet, helping up Dixon. Edwards was signaling for everyone to jump. John moved to the door when another stream of plasma fire struck the craft. He was thrown towards the cockpit as the Pelican took another hit. The dropship nosed down and sped towards the ground, the pilot managing to keep it from striking building.

The crippled Pelican rapidly losing altitude and gaining speed, cleared the park and came down hard onto a street, slamming into the wall of a building.

\* \* \*

>Havana<p><p>

Planet Nyko

1320hrs

"Let move Marines."

Corporal Sampson, 2nd Battalion, 82nd Marine Regiment, jumped up from behind the tank and rushed onto the bridge, his fire team following.

"Come on."

Plasma rounds sizzled past them. A pair of Banshees came in low and strafed the bridged. Marines began to scream around him.

"Keep moving," he shouted.

Ahead he could see the Warthogs, the M41 and Gauss cannons gunner were firing madly, trying to suppress the Covenant. The ODSTs were taking cover behind the Warthogs, some still trapped on the bridge, their attack stalled.

"Incoming mortars," someone cried.

Sampson kept moving, knowing that safety was on the other side.

"Keep moving."

The Banshees swooped down for another pass, firing their fuel rod cannons. Sampson didn't turn to look at the destruction they were causing. He kept running, his eyes locked on the Warthogs. He was halfway across.

"Follow me."

A Covenant "Air Artillery" bomber appeared over the city. Its three guns glowed blue and fired. Three mortar rounds landed on the bridge. The Banshees came in again. A Covenant Shade opened up from a

rooftop. Plasma scorched the ground around him.

A Scarab appeared in-between two buildings. It fired a stream of plasma at the Warthogs. Its secondary cannon opened up on the Marines crossing the bridge.

Sampson flattened himself as a stream of plasma flashed over head. The firing stopped and Sampson jumped up and continued to run. He was almost across the bridge when a mortar round exploded next to him, throwing him into a steel support beam. The world blurred around him as he tried to clear his head. A medic slid next to him. He began to cut away the burnt sections of camouflage. The medic was reaching into his bag when a plasma round struck his head. He collapsed onto Sampson's legs.

Sampson attempted to push the dead medic off but found he was losing strength. The passing Marines continued to be cut down by waves of plasma fire, while Sampson's world went black.

\* \* \*

>Camp Eagle<p><p>

Planet Nyko

1700hrs

"General," his aide announced entering his quarters, "Colonel Reynolds' gained the other side. He said that his first battalion was chewed up bad but they reached the other side. They attempted to push in farther but they stalled. Also most of Captain Power's company is scattered on the western side. They are regrouping at the City Park, but are cut off. Most of his units are calling for support and evac.

Kirkus looked up from the map on his desk.

"Give them everything we have and get them out of there."

"Yes sir."

His aide left the room.

"Why haven't they glassed us yet?" Kirkus thought to himself looking back down at the map. He was reaching for the pot of coffee in the corner when the air raid sirens went off.

\* \* \*

>Havana â€" City Park<p><p>

Planet Nyko

1725hrs

Cussler slowly opened his eyes.

"Come on we gotta get out of here."

Edwards was hovering over him, his helmet gone. He reached down and

hauled John to his feet.

"We gotta get to the park, follow me," Edwards shouted, as he began to sprint down the street.

Cussler began to follow, but stumbled and almost tripped. Fraizer came up to him and gave him a hard slap in the helmet.

"Move your ass."

John followed, as they moved down the street. He could hear firing in the distance, along with the high-pitched yelps of grunts.

"Incoming, take cover," someone cried.

Plasma stitched the wall above them.

"Contact, Covenant squad, two o'clock."

John crawled behind a nearby vehicle. He got on his knee and fired a burst towards the Covenant. He reached for a grenade.

"Frag out!"

The M9 fragmentation grenade detonated in the middle of the tightly packed Covenant. An Elite was blown through a shop window, the grunts being thrown about.

A plasma round struck near him. Cussler spun around and saw another squad coming up the street.

"More behind us."

John fired another three round burst, seeing a grunt keel over, spraying purple blood. Dixon was next to him, firing from a doorway.

"Hunters!"

A pair of Hunters rounded the corner in front of them. Their fuel rod cannons glowed.

"Fall back, get into the alley," Edwards shouted.

One of the Hunters fired. The round struck near their position. Amanda Ruch was caught in the splash.

"Ruch's down," Cussler shouted. "Dix, cover me!"

Dixon crouched and began to fire three round bursts at the Hunters, the bullets harmlessly bouncing off. Cussler moved to where Amanda lay, struggling to crawl for cover. He threw her over his shoulder and passed behind Dixon, who was still firing, tapping him as he passed.

John followed the rest of the squad, as they retreated down the alley. The squad slowed and finally stopped in a small courtyard, off a side street.

Daniel Bryans, the medic from 3rd fire team came over and laid Amanda on the ground, he began to work on her.

"Hold your fire coming in," someone shouted.

Four Recon men stepped into the courtyard, two of them were carrying a wounded comrade. Recon Marines were different. They developed hostility to other Marines, like ODS. They would isolate themselves from others, except members of their platoon. They wore digital woodland camo fatigues and armor. Their helmets were modeled off the ODS's full-face helmets, but Recon had smaller faceplates. Their helmets also were more advanced, easier to switch comm channels, biometers, and longer range FOF tags. They also carried MA5K Carbines instead of the BR-55.

"I'm Sergeant Major Hazner, Recon platoon, who's in command here?"

"I am," Edwards replied, moving over to the Recon man.

The two stepped out of the courtyard.

The other two moved to a corner and set their wounded buddy down, inserting more biofoam into the wound on his chest.

"You want me to check him out?" Bryans asked, moving towards them.

"No we got him," the one replied without looking up.

"You sure?" Bryans asked again taking another step towards them, "that wound looks bad."

The one Recon man looked up, you couldn't see his eyes, but you knew what they looked like by the voice, "I said we got it."

Bryans nodded and took a step back and went back to working on Ruch

Cussler leaned back against a wall, pulling out a canteen. Dixon sat next to him, inserting a fresh mag into his BR55.

"Alright, we're moving out," Hazner announced coming back in. "We're going straight for the park, no stopping to take cover. Just run and gun."

"My guys let's go," Edwards ordered.

Cussler stood followed and they exited the courtyard. They sprinted out to a main road and proceeded up it. The park was insight ahead. Several Pelicans were hovering over the park, ready to extract.

Plasma flashed by, impacting on the walls and vehicles round them.

"Covenant behind us."

"Keep moving," Hazner shouted.

Cussler felt something burn at his leg. The leg went numb and he collapsed to the ground. He looked up see his squad continuing up the street, oblivious to the fact that he'd been hit. John rolled onto his back and fired a burst at the approaching Covenant, dropping a grunt. He began to crawl into an alley, dragging with his left arm and pushing himself with his good leg, still gripping his "55 in his right hand.

He managed to reach the alley, allowing himself a minute to rest. He turned to check down the alley. A pair of blue armored legs blocked his view. Slowly Cussler looked up. An Elite was standing over him, a plasma rifle pointed at his face. The Elite grinned.

### 3. Chapter 3: Let's Hit the Bastards

**\*\*Let's hit the Bastards\*\***

**\*\*DAY 2\*\***

In Space over Nyko

0234hrs

"Preparing to exit Slipspace Captain," Lieutenant Bedlow called out.

Captain Doherty clenched the sides of his command chair. His stomach was in knots, he was nervous, although he'd never let it show. In the next thirty seconds he would find out the fate of the men on Nyko.

"Lieutenant Rio, prepare to get me the National, we may need to jump quickly," Doherty ordered. "Lieutenant Stenson warm up out MAC guns, arm archer pods A through F, and remove the safety from one of our Shiva nukes."

"Aye Captain."

"Exiting Slipspace in 5â€|4â€|3â€|2â€|1."

Nyko flashed into sight on the view screen.

Doherty exhaled upon seeing the green and blue of the planet. The knot in his stomach disappeared. The planet hadn't been glassed.

"Lieutenant Rio scan the planet, look for Covenant ships, sensors, whatever, and get me the National."

"Aye Captain."

Rio typed for a few seconds before Closson appeared on screen.

"They haven't made it here I guess," Closson observed.

"Yes, so it would seem, cut some power, slow down."

Closson nodded to someone off screen.

"Captain, Covenant Cruiser in high orbit around the planet. She's being escorted by a pair of Frigates!" Rio called out.

"Looks like we got trouble, you want to jump?" Closson asked.

"No," Doherty replied.

"You're gonna fight them?"

"Lieutenant Stenson get us a firing solution for the Cruiser," he said as a reply.

"You're nuts," Closson observed.

"Are you staying or going?" Doherty responded.

Closson paused for a full minute, his head bowed.

"Ready the MAC gun, target the cruiser," Closson ordered someone, looking up.

Doherty nodded his thanks.

"If we survive this, both are careers are over," Closson told him.

"Ya well, they weren't going anywhere anyway."

The two Frigates turned towards them, their plasma turrets glowed blue.

"Stenson, prepare to fire a Shiva."

"Aye, Aye," Stenson replied, punching commands on his computer.

Doherty stared at the display and picked up his data pad. He quickly typed in some calculations. It would have to be perfect, and without an AI

"Oh fuck it," Doherty said to himself.

"Sending coordinates now Lieutenant."

"Received Captain," Stenson replied, turning in his chair. "Sir these coordinates are right behind us."

"Yes I know, fire the Shiva."

"Aye sir, Firing."

Doherty looked at the display again, hoping it worked. The two Frigates were still closing in. The cruiser, he saw, was still in orbit around the planet.

"Lieutenant Rio, send these coordinates to the National."

"Yes Captain, sending."

Closson raised an eyebrow, on the view screen, looking down at his

data pad.

"You sure this is going to work?" he asked. "This is going to be tight."

"We'll find out shortly," Doherty replied.

"Sir Covenant Frigates firing," Rio announced.

Four blue dots appeared on screen, gradually becoming bigger.

"Firing solution online Captain," Stenson told him.

"Fire!"

Two thumps echoed through the ship. On the display, the National fired as well. Three white streaks sped towards the Covenant cruiser.

"Plasma collision in fifteen seconds," Rio called out.

"Closson now!"

The Remington turned hard to port. The National, running parallel with them but lagging a bit, angled to starboard. The two ships increased their speed, they barely missed each other as they passed by. The four plasma torpedoes tracking them, two apiece, attempted to shift course to follow. Two collided with each other, exploding harmlessly. The remaining two just missed and continued to track the two ships. The UNSC ships again turned and increased their speed, this time away from the Frigates.

"Aft cameras."

The two torpedoes were still tracking them, as were the two Frigates. The three MAC rounds impacted the Covenant cruiser. The first two impacted on its shield, which flickered and died. The third impacted in front of the ship's engines. The cruiser listed hard to port, its engines dying. The Frigates continued in pursuit. Their plasma turrets glowed blue.

"Prepare to fire Archer pods A through F, Lieutenant Stenson."

"Aye Captain."

Doherty should have given it a few more seconds, but the frigates would have the time to fire.

"Lieutenant Stenson detonate the Shiva."

"Yes Captain."

A blinding white flash engulfed the two frigates. The vapor cloud expanded and cooled, fading from yellow to red, and then into black dust. The Covenant frigates were still intact, their shields and engines disabled.

"Lieutenant Bedlow brings us about, Stenson get us a firing solution for the MAC guns, lock Archer missiles on the two frigates."

The Remington slowly turn around, the two frigates still floated dead in space.

"Firing solution online," Bedlow announced.

"Fire."

Twin streaks of light and missiles rocketed towards the nearest frigate. The National fired as well. The first MAC round struck the first frigate midline, the second impacting in its engines. Small explosions erupted along its hull. The Archer missiles impacted next, tearing the Covenant ship apart.

The second frigate was gutted stem to stern and began to list to port. It collided with the other frigate as the National's archer missiles struck. The two ships disappeared in a ball of fire.

"Nice idea," Closson said, still on the display.

"Ya lets finish off that cruiser."

"Lieutenant Bedlow, head for the cruiser."

"Aye Captain,"

The Remington and National sped towards the crippled cruiser its engines dead, still listing to port, slowly being sucked in by the planet's atmosphere.

"Bring us in, get a firing solution."

"Captain!" Rio cried out. "Detecting energy spikes, her turrets are still active. She's preparing to fire!"

"Evasive maneuvers!" Doherty ordered.

The cruiser's turrets glowed blue and it fired.

"Plasma torpedo away," Rio announced. "Tracking us, collision in ten seconds."

"Bring us hard to port."

"Aye Captain," Bedlow replied.

"Impact in 5&#124;4&#124;3&#124;2&#124;1."

Doherty was thrown to the floor as the torpedo struck. The whole destroyer shook violently.

"We're hit, decompressions on decks F, G, and H," Rio cried. "Sections four through fifteen, sealing those areas."

"Stenson fire the MAC guns."

"Aye, firing."

Doherty picked himself, staring at the display.



The first MAC round struck the alien ship in its bow. The second impacted midline. The cruiser took the rounds, its turrets glowed blue. The National fired another salvo. The heavy round must have hit the cruiser's reactor because the alien ship buckled, internal explosions blossoming throughout the ship. The Covenant cruiser disappeared in a ball of light.

\* \* \*

>Outskirts of Covenant Base <p>0250hrs<p>

Private First Class Alyssa Cole peered down the scope of her SRS99C sniper. The grunts and jackals manning the perimeter looked bored.

"Well they're about to get a surprise," she whispered.

The bush next to her stirred, quietly stretching.

"I told you to wake me in half an hour," it said.

"Ya well a little extra sleep never hurt anyone, Tim."

Gierlowski grunted, pulling out a night scope.

The Covenant base was quiet. Few lights illuminated the area. Perimeter defense consisted of grunts and jackals manning a couple shades and some roughly made earthworks. She could make out several wraiths hidden under tarps, along with numerous ghosts nearby. A few Phantom dropships were in the center of the base.

"Alpha 6 this is Sierra 1-1, checking in," Cole whispered over the COM, even though no one could hear her outside her helmet, she liked to be sure.

"Copy, Sierra 1-1, all quiet?" Colonel Reynolds asked from less than three miles away.

"Roger Alpha 6."

"10-4, get ready we move at 0300hrs."

"Copy 0300hrs, over and out."

She continued to scan the base, looking for any unusual signs. Behind them a battalion of Marines from the 82nd and a tank platoon sat waiting, ready to strike.

\* \* \*

>0259hrs <p>Sergeant Edwin Rivera stood in the open canopy of his M808 MBT. The mission counter displayed on his dash below him was counting down.<p>

"We loaded?" he asked his gunner Tony Wells.

"One HEAT in the tube Sarge," Wells replied.

"All units begin your advance, hit them hard and fast," Colonel Reynolds said over the COM, as the mission timer hit 00:00.

"You heard the man, lets roll," Rivera firing up the tank's engine.

The Scorpion roared to life and slowly rumbled forward, several Marines jumping on, others falling in around it.

\* \* \*

>Lance Corporal Joseph Mick signaled for his squad to move out. He fell in next to the nearest Scorpion, waving to the tank commander standing up in front of the turret. He activated the night scope on his BR-55, flipping off the safety. He continued on at a brisk pace.<hr>Colonel Reynolds watch his men disappear over a ridge. They were all his men now. General Kirkus was killed when enemy bomber attacked Camp Eagle. The 24th thankfully suffered light casualties, less than a hundred. But they left fifteen Pelicans, three Skyhawks, twenty Warthogs and six Scorpions were ruined. So command of the 147th now shifted to Reynolds. He ordered the survivors the leave the base and scatter along the countryside and lay low. Reynolds now planned to strike an enemy base in retaliation. It wouldn't do as much damage, but it a start.

"All Sierra units, this is Alpha 6, clear to engage, I repeat clear to engage."

\* \* \*

>The M99 slammed against her shoulder. <p>"Target down," Gierlowski announced. "Shade emplacement, two meters left."<p>

Alyssa shifted to her left and squeezed the trigger. The grunt flipped backwards off the turret as the 14.5mm fin stabilized bullet struck its head.

"Down."

She moved to her left firing at an Elite as he tried to control the panicked grunts. The first round weakened its shield. The second tore through its head.

"Elite moving for the nearest Wraith," Tim called out.

She quickly reloaded and swung the rifle to her right. Two rounds put the Elite down.

"Down, Jackal three meters right, its got a beam rifle."

She pivoted right and fired.

"Down."

A sudden explosion erupted inside the base.

"Here comes the cavalry," Gierlowski announced.

"Nah, its only the Marines," the ODST replied.

\* \* \*

>"Load HEAT." <p>"Loading HEAT," Wells replied.<p>

Rivera traversed the turret to the right and fired. A Wraith exploded into a ball of blue flames.

He gunned the accelerator the Scorpion thundered forwards. Rivera climbed up to the M247, gunning down grunts as they ran about, hooting and hollering.

He switched back to the 105mm cannon and fired at another shade.

"Another HEAT."

Rivera fired again at a group of Jackals firing on the approaching Marines. He continued forward, pushing into the enemy base firing the 247 at the Covenant infantry.

"Sarge enemy Wraith, two o'clock," Wells shouted.

Edwin changed back to the 105mm cannon and fired, another Wraith down. Marines stormed past him, charging into the base.

\* \* \*

>Mick passed the Scorpion tank, and quickly climbed over the earthworks, killing several grunts that sheltered on the opposite side. He shouted for his fire team to follow and pressed into the base. An Elite stepped out in front of him. He quickly squeezed the trigger. The three round burst depleting the Elite's shield, another burst finished the Covenant warrior. <p>He sprinted up to a parked Wraith and climbed up, producing a M9 grenade and throwing it into the open hatch. He jumped down and continued through the motor pool. The Wraith exploding behind him.<p>

He dove behind a storage container as plasma stitched the ground around him. Private Collins joined him. He peered around the corner and saw a Covenant plasma turret firing on them. They had an inner trench set up and were falling back to it.

"Fuck it's got us pinned," Collins growled.

A Scorpion rumbled past, its machine gun taking out the gunner. Mick waved his thanks to the driver as he sprinted past. He sprinted for the trench, going prone in front of it where he lobbed a frag down in. He heard a roar followed by the explosion. He stood back up and jumped in. Several grunts tried to run away, but he gunned them down. Marines began to pour into the trench, slowly clearing it out.

Within minutes they captured the position and with it the base, which they left a smoking ruin as they left, taking with them ten captured Ghosts and two Wraiths.

\* \* \*

>Over Eastern Havana <p>0635hrs<p>

Lieutenant Birney experienced a brief moment of piece, seeing the sun slowly rise as he passed over Havana, enjoying the golden sky and the

quietness.

"Foxtrot Gamma 1, this is Nevada 1-1, we need air support at our position!" a battalion commander cried over the radio, bringing him back to reality. "We will mark the target with a strobe."

"Copy, we're coming in," Birney replied, pulling away from the sunrise.

He banked sharply in his Skyhawk Jump Jet. Havana passed quickly below them. His gunner Lieutenant Smith arming a WP-5 200lb-phosphorus bomb. They came in low down a main street, below them infantry were engaging the attacking swarms of Covenant. Many of the Marines units constructed fortifications out of rubble and were now putting them to good use.

"Strobe is out," the battalion commander announced. Down the street he could see the pulsating blue light.

"Roger I got it in my sights."

Birney rocketed over the area, releasing two WP-5s. He pulled up sharply climbing above the city. Below him the WP-5 detonated. A fireball appeared on the street, engulfing the Covenant Forces, their shields no match for the burning phosphorus. There were secondary explosions as Wraiths, Ghosts, and a Shadow were caught in the inferno.

"Birney enemy Seraphs coming in 5 o'clock, looks to be 5 of them!" Smith cried.

Birney banked to his right hard, turning into them.

"This is a bad idea," he told himself. The Seraphs could easily destroy them, they were faster and better armed. But he had to try something or they would wreak havoc on the ground troops below.

His radar showed 5 contacts in a "V" formation coming right for them. He dropped down into the streets, the Seraphs rocketing over them. He pulled up circling around behind them, kicking in his afterburners. He quickly caught up, thankful they weren't move at full speed. Staying in the building he armed a Sidekick missile.

"Got a tone, firing Fox two!" Smith announced.

The Sidekick rocketed towards the nearest Seraph. Its shield may have with stood his 50mm gattling cannons, but not the Sidekick air to air missile. The Seraph turned into a fireball soaring towards the ground. The rest of the squadron, stunned by the sudden loss broke up each racing in a different direction.

Birney rocketed after one. The Seraph spotted him and dove low, twisting and turning trying to lose him.

"Got tone, Fox two!"

Another Seraph down.

"Shit, ones behind us," Smith cried.

Birney banked left putting the Skyhawk into a sharp turn, the Seraph followed. The alien fighter may have been faster but the Skyhawk could turn better. The Seraph couldn't make the sharp turn and blew past him. Birney compensated to the right, putting him right behind the Seraph.

"Fox two!" Smith announced.

The Seraph burst into flames, but kept flying, losing speed.

"I'll finish him with the 50s," his gunner told him.

Birney increased his speed catching up to the crippled fighter. There was a loud humming sound as the quad 50mm gattling cannons shredded the Seraph. The Seraph nosed down and slammed into the ground.

"Other two are bugging out!" Smith announced cheerfully grabbing Birney's flight seat and shaking it. "We did it!"

\* \* \*

>Unknown location <p>1307hrs<p>

"Cussler, John. Private First Class, UNSC 31891-147," he slowly mumbled, blood dripping from his mouth. He jerked on the restraints, holding him in place in the chair.

"He doesn't care who your are," the computer said, translating for the black armored Elite. Two others stood by the door, their plasma rifles at the ready.

The Elite backhanded Cussler and grumbled something to the computer.

"What is the location of your bases?"

"Goâ€|fuckâ€|yourâ€|self," Cussler replied slowly, staring right at the Elite.

The Elite backhanded him again, harder.

"He says we'll try this again then its going to get painful."

"Tell him to drop dead."

Something large rumbled over head, shaking the building they were in. The Elite said something and walked out.

"He's going to get some 'tools' and will be right back."

"He better hurry up, I'm getting bored."

John sat there for a few minutes in silence, trying to think of a way to escape, when the Elite walked back in. He unstrapped John, one arm at a time, putting two blue rings around his wrist. They slowly floated up, pulling John out of the chair and into a somewhat standing position.

"Last chance," the computer told him.

John simply stared ahead as the Elite moved to the computer. It just began to push buttons when the door exploded, sending splinters across the room. Cussler closed his eyes and turned his head. There was a loud bang and flash and he was blinded. He could faintly hear the gunfire. The Elite roared

"John!" a surprised voice cried.

Someone freed his hand and caught him as he collapsed to the ground, gently lying down. Dixon hovered above of him, shaking him.

"John, are you all right?" he asked.

He nodded, still a bit stunned.

"Come on Dix, help me carry him," Fraizer ordered coming over. Grover was by the door, firing.

They each put an arm around him and dragged him out. They moved down a hallway, entering an elevator. Needles impaled themselves in the wall of the elevator. Fraizer set him down and fired down the hall, rapidly emptying his M7. The elevator slowly began to rise.

"Delta 2-1 were coming out," Fraizer said.

The elevator reached the top floor and they sprinted down the hall. They bursted out onto the roof, where a Pelican sat waiting, the rest of the squad had a perimeter set up, Edwards was crouched besides it waving for them to get in.

John jumped on and strapped himself in, the rest of the squad piled in. He was surprised to see several civilians sitting towards the front.

"Go, go, go," Edwards shouted.

The Pelican's engines roared and it quickly accelerated into the air. Havana gradually disappeared below them, giving way to wooded ridges and hills.

147th's Temporary HQ

\* \* \*

>Eastern Havana <p>1621hrs<p>

"Colonel," Colonel Jones said coming up to Reynolds.

Reynolds looked up from the maps, sprawled on the hood of a Warthog.

"Sir, we are still holding them in Havana. We're taking losses, but they're reports that Covenant are climbing over their dead to keep advancing."

"Ok," Reynolds replied. "Tell Jackson to move his men into the Spotslow woods and hold the crossroads there. Recon is telling us that there is a Covenant force moving that way, if they take it then they'll have a good area to flank our force in the city. Have

Robinson give them some help. Also, Nadal is to loan one battalion to Jackson and move the other three into reserve inside the city behind the 82nd."

Jones nodded and left, climbing into his personnel Warthog. A Pelican landed nearby, Reynolds grabbing the map to keep it from blowing away. He didn't recognize the number, which worried him.

Reynolds jaw dropped when Captain Doherty walked down the ramp and came over to him.

"Captain, you don't know how glad I am to see you," Reynolds told him, grinning as he offered his hand.

Doherty hesitantly took it and gave a wary smile. Reynolds smile faded when he saw it.

"What?"

"They didn't send help. They said you'd be glassed before help could arrive."

"What?" Reynolds said again. "Then why are you here?"

"I wanted to make sure. So I convinced a buddy of mine to come with me."

Reynolds nodded, he felt as if they'd all been sentenced to death.

"How's everything been going down here?" Doherty asked.

"Could be better," Reynolds replied. "They are hitting Havana hard. I've got a regiment holding them in the eastern side of the city. We're stretched thin. We've managed for now to have air supremacy. But they are doing something strange. Aerial reconnaissance reports that the Covenant are bring excavating equipment down and are digging something in the bottom of the gorge. Did you bring any support?"

Doherty shook his head.

"The battalion commander of the Marines stationed on the National, practically put a gun to Commander Closson's head, the guy who came with me, and told him to send them down to help. He's sending fifteen Pelicans, five Scorpions, a battery of Rhinos, ten Warthogs, and one of those big Albatross dropships. Also he has a squadron of Shortsword bombers as well."

"Good, we could use the support."

"We destroyed two Frigates and a Cruiser, so for now we control the space." Doherty told him.

"Have the Shortswords begin hitting Covenant bases."

"I'm going to try talking to High Command, I'll take videos, pictures, whatever and show them that you're alive."

"When can we expect you back?"

"Three days, four maximum," Doherty promised, "if they don't send anything we'll come back and haul you all out ourselves, even if you gotta sit shoulder to shoulder down every passageway, we'll get you outta here."

\* \* \*

>Spotslow Woods <p>2020hrs<p>

Cussler heard the last Pelican land in the LZ. Bringing with it the last of the Scorpions and Marines from the 54th.

They were ordered into this area a few hours ago. First they cleared a LZ for the Pelicans which was just off the crossroads. Then they constructed a circular perimeter consisting of two man foxholes. The Scorpions and Warthogs were placed in an inner perimeter, surrounded by a trench, that would be used as a fallback position.

Dixon sat next to him smoking a cigarette, his head and shoulders covered in a survival blanket to keep the glow from giving away their positions. He held a night scope up, scanning the woods in front of him. The only thing he saw was a deer.

"Christ, this is going to get boring fast," Dixon mumbled, uncovering himself.

John grunted, "tell me about it."

There was a long pause between the two of them.

"How did you know where the Covenant were holding me?" Cussler asked.

"Two civilians, who managed to survive snuck outta the city and came to our camp. They told us how the Covenant was executing civilians, having Jackals rip them apart, hunting them for fun. They said that groups were holed up in building, sewers, wherever they could hide. One had a map that someone gave to him which marked a couple of these."

"Reynolds wanted us to get them out. We raided the building and found you. We thought you were dead. When you weren't with us when we got to the park, we figured you got hit," Dixon told him looking down.

Cussler nodded slowly, it was dumb luck that they found him.

"When did you get hit," Dixon asked.

"Not long after we left," John replied. "Something hit my leg and it gave out. I dragged myself into an alley and an Elite was there. It hit me with its plasma rifle and knocked me out. When I came to I as in a room being interrogated."

John removed his helmet and took a sip from a canteen. Dixon said nothing and began to fiddle with his Br55.

"Stay awake ladies," Edwards whispered coming over to them. "OPs are reporting movement to their front. Keep scanning the woods and stay



ready. If you see two blue flares, that's the signal to fallback." He left them and moved on to the next hole.

"Shit, couldn't we have one night of peace," Dixon grumbled, putting on his helmet. John did the same.

"I guess not."

He picked up the night scope and scanned the woods. The deer was gone.

\* \* \*

><p><p>

Please give reviews.

#### 4. Chapter 4: Counter Attack

**\*\*Counter-Attack\*\***

**\*\*Day 3\*\***

Eastern Havana

0254hrs

"I'm telling you I saw something."

Lieutenant Garcia sighed.

"You sure?" he asked.

"Positive," Sergeant Zoshack told him, pointing to their front. Garcia quickly stuck his head over the barricade they were sheltered behind, he saw something move.

Garcia nodded motioning for his radioman. Taking the handset from him.

"This is Garcia 19," he said. "I'm requesting illumination in front of my location, stand by for HE on same coordinates."

"Roger that Garcia," a voice replied. "Illumination incoming, HE on the ready."

Three miles away, outside the city, a battery of Rhino 105mm artillery tanks sat, a single tank fired an illumination round. The round detonated in air, releasing a red flare. The grounding front of them was illuminated exposing Covenant Elites, Jackals, and Grunts. There were hundreds, if not thousands of them. Line after line of them, numerous grunts hauling plasma turrets. They suddenly froze. The Marines opened fire, Scorpion tanks a couple dozen yards, behind them adding in. The Covenant, dropping by the dozens, caught out in the open, began to charge.

"Go for the Elites," Garcia ordered, as he fired.

Zoshack next to him was firing a M247. His radioman suddenly screamed

and collapsed, clutching his chest.

"MEDIC!" Garcia shouted.

He grabbed the handset from his radioman.

"We need artillery at our location," he shouted, trying to be heard over the roar of gunfire. "Right now."

The Rhinos simultaneously fired, six HE shells landing among the Covenant, sending bodies flying.

"Keep em coming," Garcia ordered. Shells rained down into the Covenant ranks.

Garcia shouted a curse, dropping the handset, as an Elite jumped onto the barricade they were sheltered behind. He began to fire three round bursts into the alien, its body jerking as the 9.5mm rounds ripped into it. Its shield died as another burst ripped into the creature's throat, showering Garcia in blue blood. The Elite fell backwards.

More Covenant swarmed over the barricade, plasma being fired directly into Marines' faces. The Marines kept up their fire, beating them back over the barricade. Garcia ducked as plasma grenades began to land among them. He heard Zoshack scream. The grenades detonated. Garcia looked up and Zoshack was gone.

"Frag over!" Garcia shouted.

He reached for a grenade and lobbed it over the barricade, others doing the same. He heard the Covenant, shriek, hoot, and bark as the grenades detonated.

"All units, Covenant forces have broken through at B Company's location," someone said over the battalion net, built into his helmet. "All units are to fallback to your secondary positions."

"Fallback," Garcia ordered. "Fall back to secondary positions."

He grabbed his radioman by the arms and helped him to a Scorpion, the tank's own M247 madly firing. Garcia lifted the wounded Marine on. He turned and fired, covering the rest of his platoon as they retreated, some jumping on the tank as it pulled out of its position and slowly reversed, still firing.

An explosion knocked him down, he picked himself up, plasma and needles kicking up around him. He ducked into a doorway, plasma scorching the wall. He tried to beat open the door with his rifle.

"Fuck," he growled when it refused to open. He turned back out, preparing to run. An arm suddenly grabbed him from behind and hauled him inside.

"What the hell," he muttered, grabbing his M6C and aiming it at the shadow.

"Shhh!" a voice said. "Follow."

The figure lit a match, illuminating a middle-aged man dressed in black. He led Garcia down a flight of steps leading into a basement.

"Down here," he whispered pointing to a hole in the floor.

Garcia holstered his pistol and climbed down the rusty ladder, leading into a sewer. He was surprised to find several men and women waiting, some armed. The man started down the ladder, pausing to replace the hatch and came down.

"I'm Ralph Miles," the man said offering his hand. "And you areâ€|"

"Oh, Lieutenant Garcia," he replied, still a bit surprised.

"We should get moving Ralph," someone said coming up, he gave Garcia the once over and began to walk away. The others following.

"That's Charlie," Ralph whispered. "He thinks he's in charge."

Garcia nodded, watching Charlie lead them off through the tunnel.

"It'd be best if you stick with us for now," Ralph told him.

He fell in aside of Ralph as they slowly moved through the sewer.

"So you're a Marine?" a younger one, probably in his teens, asked. He was cradling an old bolt action rifle.

"Ya."

"What unit?"

"82nd of the 147th."

"What happened?" the teen asked.

"I'm sorry?" Garcia replied.

"How did you get separated?"

"We were told to fallback and I was taking fire so I ducked into a doorway. Ralph must have heard my knocking."

"I was searching the house for food," Ralph announced.

"Why were our proud Marines retreating?" Charlie asked from the front.

"The Covenant broke through in one part of our line."

"Big mad Marines," he muttered sarcastically.

Several of the group traded looks. They continued on in silence.

"Yo, Charlie," Garcia said, hustling up to him. "You want me to take point?"

Charlie glared at him, "I got it jarhead."

Garcia stopped, letting the rest pass by, falling in behind Ralph. They quietly continued through the sewer, either heading for survival or death at the hands of the Covenant, Garcia wasn't sure which.

\* \* \*

>Spotslow woods <p>0333hrs<p>

Cussler emptied his mag into an Elite that came charging at them.

"Blow the mine!" he shouted.

Dixon picked up the remote and pressed the button. The Antlion antipersonnel mine they placed in front of them detonated, engulfing a squad of Grunts and two Elites. Cussler fired a burst into a stunned Jackal, struggling to get its shield to work.

Just after 3 a.m. the Covenant attacked, hard. Swarms of the bastards swept through the woods. They called in airstrikes around their perimeter and beat back the first wave. Now they were acting smart using fire and maneuver tactics.

A hail of plasma singed the air above them, making them duck down. Cussler began to blind fire, trying to stall the Covenant attack.

"Cover me throwing grenade," Dixon told him.

Cussler jumped up and rapidly fired three round bursts at everything that moved. Dixon's grenades landed next to a plasma turret, engulfing it in a ball of fire.

A group of Jackals, their shields overlapping began to advance on them, two Elites following, firing their Carbines. Cussler fired at the nearest Jackal, having no effect. They barely parted, allowing a Grunt to set up a turret, which began to fire upon them.

"Shit now what," Dixon asked.

John tried to get a shot, but plasma streaked by.

"Fuck, cover me I'll try to flank them," Cussler said.

Dixon lobbed another grenade at them as Cussler jumped up out of the hole. He sprinted out to their right, ducking behind a tree. He could see the Jackals green shields, as well as the blue plasma, being poured at Dixon.

He slowly crept behind them, being careful not to make too much noise. Muzzle flashes from other positions gave an eerie effect. He had to be careful, not to step on any bodies from the first wave and trip.

John suddenly froze, easing himself against a tree, which wasn't shredded from the airstrikes. A squad of Grunts was approaching him. He was next to invisible in black fatigues and armor, but he gently brought up his rifle, just in case, preparing for the worst. They slowly began to pass by one by one.

He let out a breath of relief when they passed and began for the turret. He finally was fully around them. Gripping his M4 in his left hand, his right grabbing a grenade, arming and throwing it. It landed quietly behind the group.

The grenade detonated, sending the Jackals, tumbling towards, vaporizing the Elites and destroying the plasma turret.

"Dix, coming back," he shouted.

Cussler sprinted forward past the dead Covenant and dove into the hole.

"Nice job," Dixon told him. The plasma fire finally slackened and then stopped and everything became quiet. "What the hell," Dixon muttered.

Two blue flares suddenly were launched behind them, basking the area in a blue glow. "Fallback now?" Cussler asked.

Dixon shrugged and they climbed out. Barks, hoots, and shrieks rose up behind them. Plasma mortars started to land near them.

"Oh shit, run!" Cussler told him.

They sprinted towards the flares, plasma and needles streaked above them as they weaved around trees and bushes. They finally broke out into the open, running for the trench. Other Marines were coming out of the woods, all heading for the same location. John jumped in, Dixon following. To his surprise, they met Fraizer and Grover.

"Glad to see you two," Fraizer told them. "Get up on the firing step and stay ready. They're massing in front of us."

A red flare was launched, their signal that anything moving in the trees was to be shot. Cussler climbed up onto the step, propping his rifle on the lip of dirt at the top. He quickly scraped a small ledge in the dirt and set three grenades on it. The flare slowly drifted to the ground and died. Everything suddenly became quiet. No one moved, afraid to make noise. Cussler held his breath waiting for the next move.

The wood line suddenly erupted in a sheet of plasma and needles. Marines began to scream around him. He ducked down as plasma stitched the top of the trench. Fraizer grunted and dropped backwards off the step. The Marines slowly began to return fire, the Scorpions firing their first rounds. Explosions dotted the tree line as 90mm shells and Antlion mines detonated amongst the Covenant.

Cussler stepped down off the step, kneeling next to Fraizer, who was cursing, clutching his arm. A pink needle was sticking out. He reached into his pack for biofoam. The needle exploded, taking a large chunk out of his bicep. Fraizer groaned and leaned back. John inserted the tip of the biofoam container in the wound. He slapped a

bandage on it and tied it tight around his arm. Fraizer nodded his thanks and climbed back up, firing his M7 one handed. Cussler jumped back up, the open ground was swarming with Covenant.

"There's thousands of them," Grover gasped.

"Keep firing," Fraizer said through gritted teeth.

The Covenant forces began to charge the trench, wildly firing their weapons. Plasma and needles kicked up around them. Cussler felt something burn his arm, but he kept shooting. His ammo counter quickly dropped to zero and he slammed in a fresh mag. He grabbed a grenade and threw it. It seemed to have no effect, the Covenant just climbed over their dead. They seemed hell-bent on taking the crossroads at any cost.

\* \* \*

>Major Jackson watched the Covenant onslaught near his men, from his CP. The Scorpions were firing a constant stream of 7.62 bullets and 90mm shells but it was having no effect. They were going to need help. The Covenant were charging forward, nearing the trenches. One they reached it, his men would be slaughtered. They need help and soon. <p>"Get me Captain Perry now," he told his radioman.<p>

\* \* \*

>Private First Class Eric Roland of the 54th gritted his teeth as the recoil from his M247 shook him to the bone. He swept the field, the 7.62 bullets shredding Covenant forces. But it was having no effect. Roland would gun down ten, and twenty would take its place. One squad would drop down, spraying the area with plasma and needles, while another moved up. It was working and they were approaching the trench, getting closer every second. The Scorpion behind him fired, sending bodies flying, it's own 247 firing madly. <p>"Roland," his assistant gunner, Robert Jepson shouted to him. "Slow your rate of fire, or you'll met the barrel."<p>

"We're fucked either way," he shouted back and kept firing.

He spotted a pair of Hunters in the mass of Covenant and swung his gun towards them, still firing. He poured fire into the first. It brought its shields up but couldn't stand the hail of bullets. It reared back, gushing orange blood, and collapsed. Its partner roared and rumbled forward, right towards Roland. He concentrated fire on it until it to collapsed in a heap.

His AG opened another box of ammo, ready to reload. A second later the gun stopped. Roland quickly opened the feed cover while Jepson fed him the new belt. He slipped it into place and slapped the cover back down, yanking the charging handle.

He reaimed his MG at an Elite, when something struck him, hard, in the chest. He leaned back and fell of the firing step, gasping for breath. Jepson knelt next to him, checking his wound, pulling out a can of biofoam. Roland struggled to pick his head up and look at the wound, but Jepson pushed him down.

"MEDIC!" Jepson screamed.

"Hang in there," he told Roland.

A medic came running up. Jepson climbed back onto the step and began to fire the M247. The medic applied pressure to the wound trying to slow the bleeding.

"You're gonna be fine," the medic told him.

Roland could still faintly hear him, but the voice was becoming distant, as blackness overtook him.

\* \* \*

>"Load a Beehive," Corporal Mike Clifton ordered. <p>His gunner, Ryan Li, signaled that it was loaded. Clifton fired, the Scorpion's main cannon roared. The Beehive round sent 8000 flechettes downrange. Dozens of Covenant dropped.<p>

"Another Beehive."

"Loading Beehive," Li replied. "Loaded."

He fired again, dozens more dropped. A Marine climbed up into the M247 turret, underneath the main cannon. Clifton hoped the man had hearing protection, or else he wouldn't be hearing anything for a while. Plasma scorched the armor around the Marine, but he kept firing.

"Another Beehive!"

He fired again, dozens more being massacred.

"Mike, enemy Wraith hidden in the trees," Li called out.

"Load a HEAT."

"Loading HEAT."

He sighted the tank and fired. The round impacted on the front of the tank.

"Another HEAT."

He fired again, the Wraith exploding in a blue fireball. His turret gunner suddenly grunted and leaned against the gun. Clifton called out to him but got no reply.

"Shit incoming," Li shouted.

A mortar impacted on the front of the Scorpion. He heard Li scream. The 90mm cannon was bent at an awkward angle, useless. He climbed down into the tank, flinching as sparks shot out of controls. A red light was flashing, signaling that the engine was disable. They were stuck.

He reached Li. He was pinned under the automated arm, which loaded the shells. Equipment blocked his way.

"Ryan!" he called to him.

He got no reply. He tried to reach forward when he saw the metal pipe lodged into Li's skull. He turned back and climbed out, grabbing his M6 Carbine, an M6C pistol with a longer barrel and stock.

He climbed out of the tank, sprinting the short distance to the trench, when another mortar struck the tank. The turret exploded, flying off.

"Who are you?" a Marine asked.

"Tanker."

The Marine nodded and went back to firing. Clifton joined him on the firing step and carefully aiming, he fired.

\* \* \*

>For PFC Jessica Grover it was the same, slap in a fresh mag, gun down several Covenant, repeat. She ducked down as a plasma grenade sailed into the trench, attaching itself to an ODS, trying to clear a jam in his Br-55. <p>"Get it off," she shouted to him.<p>

The Marine ripped off his helmet and heaved it out of the trench towards the Covenant. He managed to breathe a sigh of relief when another stuck to him.

"Oh fu-," he managed before it exploded.

"Bastards," she cursed, standing back up and emptied her mag into a charging Elite.

A group of Jackals overlapped their shields, with another row angling their shields upward to prevent grenades from landing behind them, and began slowly coming towards them, laying down a good rate of fire. A Scorpion behind her fired its 90mm cannon, sending the Jackals flying.

A silver armored Elite charged towards her, wielding an energy sword. She fired at it but the alien leaped over her and landed behind her in the trench. She turned and tried to fire as the Elite swung the sword, cutting her across the lower chest. She screamed and collapsed to the ground.

Fraizer heard this and turned on the Elite and sprayed fire at it, from up on the firing step. Its shields died, but the Elite swung again, amputating both his legs off. The Elite turned back to Grover, who was struggling to crawl away, and unholster her M6C at the same time. It stepped up to her and raised its energy sword, stabbing her in the chest.

\* \* \*

>Corporal William McPherson fired his M90, 8-gauge shotgun at the Elite just as it, stabbed an ODS. He jacked in another shell and fired again. The Elite flipped end over end as the buckshot ripped into it. He fired again into the dead alien. <p>He knelt next to the ODS, checking for a pulse. There was none. Another ODS lay nearby, both his legs missing above the knee.<p>

"Bastard," McPherson growled and fired again into the dead Elite.



He picked up the ODS'T's BR-55 and began to fire. He spotted a pair of Hunters approaching the trench. They fired their fuel rod cannons at a MG emplacement, the gunner being vaporized.

"Hatcher, rocket," McPherson called out.

Private Hatcher came running up, cradling his M19 launcher. He climbed up to the step and aimed.

A tank behind them fired, just as Hatcher did, the 90mm shell reaching the target before the 102mm rocket. The Hunter was vaporized as the two explosives struck it. Its partner sighted Hatcher as the source, roared and charged towards them.

Hatcher panicked and fired again, the rocket going wide.

"Shit," Hatcher cursed fumbling for another tube. McPherson fired at the charging Hunter trying to delay it. The Hunter fired its fuel rod cannon at him. McPherson ducked as the green beam struck the far side of the trench. The Hunter jumped into the trench, the ground trembling as it landed. It knocked McPherson down hard.

Hatcher raised the M19 but the Hunter smacked it out of his hands, the launcher landing next to McPherson. The Hunter roared again and brought its shield down hard, decapitating Hatcher.

McPherson crawled to the M19 as the Hunter came over to him. He picked it up, the Hunter was towering over him, raising its boot, preparing to crush him. McPherson aimed as the boot came down and fired.

\* \* \*

>"Are you sure?" the Shortsword squadron commander asked.  
<p>"Affirmative," Major Jackson replied grim faced. "They're in our trenches."<p>

He set the handset down, grabbing his M6J Carbine, leaning against a rock, already hearing the low hum. He aimed at the Covenant, that were jumping over the trench, heading towards his CP and the crossroads.

\* \* \*

>Cussler jabbed his battle rifle's barrel into the Elites chest, and squeezed the trigger. Its shields couldn't handle the 9.5mm bullets at such a close range and failed. He fired another burst that ripped through the alien. It dropped backwards against the wall of the trench. Its squad of Grunts jumped in as well. John gunned them down, quickly changing mags. <p>Another Elite landed next to him, knocking his gun outta his hands. Cussler quickly pulled out his M6C and fired at the Elite, dropping it. Another jumped in, Grunts following. John emptied the pistol mag into the Elite, its shields dying. He dropped his pistol and unsheathed his combat knife. Jabbing it into the Elites throat, pulling it out and stabbing it again. It collapsed to the ground, dead. He quickly stabbed the nearest Grunt, blue blood spraying across his faceplate. He yanked it out and killed another.<p>

"Cussler," Edwards shouted grabbing him by the arm. "We got air strikes coming, get down and stay down."

John nodded picking up his BR-55. He gunned down a Jackal and two more Grunts when he heard the roar. A Skyhawk soared over head, its 50mm cannons blazing. Cussler quickly flattened himself on the ground, trying to cover himself with Covenant bodies. More of them jumped down into the trench, engaging the Marines still standing.

There were a series of loud explosions, shaking the ground beneath him, slowly getting closer. John was suddenly picked up and thrown back down as one landed nearby. He could feel the heat from the explosion. The last thing he saw was the outline of Sergeant Edwards, still standing, calmly firing his M90 into the faces of Covenant that were jumping into the trenches. Then everything went white.

\* \* \*

>Lieutenant Birney watch in horror as the Shortswords made another pass, dropping more 200lbs Phosphorus bombs right on the Marine positions. Major Jackson wanted it right on top of them, and he was getting it. <p>"Jesus Christ," Lieutenant Smith gasped behind him, watching the hellish scene.<p>

The bombers started at the tree line and worked their way in. Thousands of Covenant infantry were being massacred.

"Bastards," Birney thought to himself.

## 5. Chapter 5: Havana Part 1

\*\*HAVANA\*\*

\*\*Day 3\*\*

Havana Gorge

0537hrs

Sergeant Major Hazner slowly crept forward, his eyes scanning left to right, searching for movement. They were on a recon into the Gorge to find out why and what the Covenant were digging. If they could, they were to destroy the site.

He and his five-man team were slowly creeping, through the woods and brush at the bottom of the gorge. The gorge was surprisingly wide, allowing enough light, for plant life to grow.

He signaled for his team to halt, forming his hand into a fist, then slowly bringing it palm down, telling them to lie down.

A squad of Grunts was approaching them. They melted into the jungle, invisible in their digital woodland fatigues. They lazily passed by, their plasma pistols slung over their shoulders. The Marines stood back up and continued forward.

"Sierra 1-1, how close are we to the site?" Hazner asked the sniper team.

"About half a kilometer away," a female voice replied.

"How many?"

"Looks to be around," the voice said pausing. "One platoons worth, guarding the site, and Covenant patrols sweeping around the site. They have support."

"Roger, keep us informed."

"Wilco. Out."

They continued to move, the sound of machinery getting louder, until the woods stopped. He could see directly in front of him, the Covenant excavation equipment. A pair of Banshees circled the sight. There was a lone Wraith parked in the open.

They had a massive operation set up. They had partially uncovered what looked like a building. It had a pointed roof, and a dull gray color to it. Grunt laborers were digging around the building.

"Sierra 1-1, we're gonna try and lure the Covenant forces away from the site and ambush them," Hazner told the snipers. "On our signal can you take out the Banshees?"

"Roger," was the reply.

He motioned for his men to gather around.

"Ok, we're gonna bring the Covenant to us," he told them. "One man will move closer and get their attention, while the rest plant, Antlion mines in a circle around that clearing we passed through before. The distracter will run right through the ambush site. When the Covenant enter the kill zone, we'll detonate the mines and gun down the rest. Quickly and quietly."

His men nodded.

"Ritter you're the fastest," Hazner said. "Just fire a burst of two and haul ass. Wait for my signal. When you run past, I want to you go back to the Warthog and bring it up, we can't carry all the explosives and that building looks pretty sturdy. Everyone else start planting the mines."

Ritter nodded, moving away from the group. The other started scraping a small hole in which to plant the mines. They each finished, rigging to their mines to a single detonator, which Hazner had.

They just finished when they heard the gunshots. He turned in time to see one of the two Banshees, slam into the ground, the second shortly behind it. He spotted Ritter, sprint towards them, Covenant forces not far behind, firing their plasma weapons.

"Get ready they're coming!"

They melted into the woods, aiming their rifles at the clearing. Ritter sprinted past, not even glancing at them, he just ran through the clearing and into the woods on the other side. Hazner grabbed the

det, placing his thumb on the button.

A Covenant platoon, consisting of six Elites, twelve Jackals, and twenty Grunts rushed into the clearing. The Jackals quickly moving forward, ready to block any fire, and the Grunts surrounding the Elites.

Hazner pressed down the button. The five Antlion mines detonated simultaneously, creating a hellish inferno. He could hear the screams of the aliens.

When the dust cleared, one Elite struggled to stand back up, along with a several Grunts. A well-placed grenade finished them off.

"Sierra 1-1, weapons free, we're moving in."

They quickly left the clearing and sprinted across the short distance to the workplace. The laborer Grunts scattered when they approached, his men gunning them down.

"Kill anything that moves," Hazner told his men.

They passed by barracks for the guards and workers, clearing out one full of sleeping Grunts. They swept through mounds of dirt piled high around the quarry. They finally reached the building.

They stacked by the entrance and entered. The inside was a metallic silver color, with a surprising amount of lighting. The walls seemed to be perfectly symmetrical and yet at odd angles. It had an eerie, alien like feeling to it.

They crept down a long hallway, running into a squad of sleeping Grunts. They silently eliminated them and continued on. There was an Alien radio next to one of the Grunts. A deep voice was talking over it.

\_"The infidels are inside,"\_ he translator told him. \_"Do not let them damage the sacred instructions, it is key to The Great Journey."\_

"Fuck, lets move faster."

\* \* \*

>Alyssa Cole readjusted herself, moving off the rock she'd been lying on.<p><p>

"No, targets visible," Gierlowski announced. "Still clear."

Three Phantom dropships roared overhead, heading for the excavation site. She looked up from the scope and saw numerous dropships and Banshees circling the site.

"Oh shit!"

\* \* \*

>"Ghost 6, this is Sierra 1-1, you have guests, I count six dropships and four Banshees," the sniper told him.<p><p>

"Copy, Sierra 1-1, were almost done here."

Ritter and Locks walked in, each with five "Damage packs" slung over their necks. They hesitated before crossing the clear blue bridge.

"What is this?" Ritter asked.

"I don't know, but it seems to work," Hazner replied. "Place the packs by the terminal and get more, quickly, we got company."

They backed across the bridge and left the room. The room itself was rather large, like a big open sphere, which wasn't well lit. There seemed to be no end, the floor just kept going. A small terminal sat on a circular glass floor in the center of the room. The only way to get to it was the bridge they somehow activated.

They had no idea how to work the terminal, so they were going to place C-12 Damage Packs around it. They brought enough to put this building in orbit.

Ritter and Locks brought the rest of the C-12, bringing the total number to sixteen Damage Packs, if that didn't work, then nothing else but a tactical nuke would. They stacked the C-12 around the terminal, rigging a remote detonator and hustled out of the room. They sprinted back up a series of ramps before finally reaching the long hallway leading out. They were suddenly met a wave of plasma fire.

Locks dropped to the ground, clutching his chest. Hazner ducked behind a pillar and returned fire. He quickly expended his sixty round mag and reloaded. They weren't going to last long, they didn't have close to the amount needed for a firefight. Each Recon man only carried around five mags for this mission.

"Frag out," Hazner shouted, he reached for a M9 and heaved it towards the door. There were a series of explosions, shrouding the hallway in dust and debris.

"Now, hit em, break out," Hazner ordered.

His men rushed forwards, firing quick burst from their MA5Ks. He paused to throw Locks over his shoulder and followed his men out.

The ground outside was swarming with Covenant forces. Thankfully they parked the Warthog right by the door. Hazner shouted for Ritter to drive and placed Locks in the back of their Troop Transport Warthog.

Ritter slammed down on the accelerator and raced off. Needles bounced off the side of the hog and they drove through the excavation site. A Banshee rocketed overhead, firing its fuel rod cannon, the orb just missing, striking a mound of dirt next to them.

Hazner gripped the roll cage as he tried to fire his MA5K one handed, the other two passengers doing the same. The Warthog drove off a mound of dirt, crushing an Elite who was in the way. A Phantom came overhead, strafing the area with its three plasma turrets. Ritter

attempted to dodge them, jumping the Hog off another dirt mound. They passed through the barracks again and entered the woods. Ritter not slowing down or stopping for anything.

Hazner pulled out the det.

A large fireball erupted over the excavation site, climbing towards the heavens.

\* \* \*

>"Sonofabitch!" she gasped.<p><p>

Cole cover her had as the shockwave passed by, kicking up clouds of dirt. She looked up in time to see four of the Phantoms engulfed in the explosion. She could no longer see the pointed roof of the structure, where once before sat a building now there was a crater. The barracks and equipment were gone, blown away.

"Time to go," Gierlowski told her.

She folded up the bipod on her M99 and they hustled for the waiting Warthog.

\* \* \*

>Division Headquarters<p><p>

0807hrs

Reynolds looked up as Nadal entered.

"Sergeant Hazner reports complete destruction of the Covenant excavation site," Nadal told him.

Reynolds nodded in satisfaction.

"But," Nadal continued. "Covenant forces are counter-attacking in the town as we speak. They broke through our lines. They landed troops behind our lines and have lined up with the breakthrough force. Our forces only have one narrow escape path."

Reynolds felt his stomach, knot. The last thing they needed right now was to have a large force cut off.

"How many men?"

"Some where around two battalions, maybe more, consisting of Marines from the 82nd and 54th," Nadal announced. "Plus some Scorpions, and Warthogs."

"Try and have them breakout," Reynolds ordered, standing up. "Mobilize the 24th have them move to the edge of the city and prepare to attack."

Nadal nodded, preparing to leave.

"Oh, how did Jackson's men fair?" Reynolds asked.

"Not good," Nadal replied. "They beat back the attack, barely."

Jackson had to call air support right on top of them. First estimates are at fifty percent or more casualties, from both battalions."

"Move the reserve battalion from the National into the woods, keep your battalion there as well. When the ODSs are ready they are to move back here."

"Yes sir," Nadal said and walked out.

\* \* \*

>Spotslow Woods<p><p>

1027hrs

Cussler slowly picked his way through the trench. Charred bodies littered the ground human and Covenant. Spent casing, empty mags, helmets, weapons, and in some cases body parts, all covered the ground. The sickening smell of burnt flesh, hung in the trenches.

Every now and then and gunshot or burst would echo out, a Marine finishing off a wounded Covenant. A collapsed section of the trench blocked his way. Men were near it, trying to dig out any bodies they were buried under it. He climbed out, surveying the landscape.

The woods were gone, for about two hundred yards out. Charred tree limbs now dotted the empty landscape. There was still smoke rising, in some spots. He walked pass the ruins of a Scorpion tank. The phosphorus bombs were dropped right on them, the trench, deep enough in most section to protect them. He reached the crossroads, which was now being used as an aide station. Wounded were lying on the road, waiting for extraction.

As if on cue, the big Albatross dropship, came down in the LZ, a squadron of Skyhawks escorting it. Unscathed Marines picked up the wounded and began to load them on. He walked past them, heading for the ruins, that was once the CP. Major Jackson was dead. A phosphorus bomb landed nearby, incinerating the small bunker.

"John," a voice called out. Cussler turned and saw Dixon approaching him, carrying a small note.

"Fraizer and Grover are dead," Dixon told him, Cussler couldn't see Dixon's face through the helmet, but knew what it looked like. "They were found under a buried section. Fraizer was missing both his legs, above the knee, and Grover looked to have two stab wounds in her chest, along with a large cut."

Cussler nodded. They knew they were missing and probably dead, but the news still came as a shock. Dixon handed him the paper to see the rest.

James Norris from 3rd fire team was dead, along with Daniel Bryans, Sergeant Edwards was found dead, Captain Powers was found dead as well. Lieutenant DiSopa seriously injured and was being evacuated to the Remington, along with the rest of the wounded to be transported back to Earth. The only remaining survivors of the squad were Dixon, himself, Alyssa Cole and Tim Gierlowski, who thankfully weren't

present for the battle. Corporal Palmer and Elizabeth Taylor from 3rd fire team were among the survivors. Corporal Jack Palmer was taking command of the squad, all fire teams being organized into one. The battalion now numbered somewhere around two companies, about 250 ODSs remaining out of the 550 that were sent in.

The note also said that they were being moved off the line and sent to Division Headquarters for reassignment.

"Palmer said to meet him at the LZ," Dixon told him.

Cussler nodded and they walked to the LZ together.

\* \* \*

>Division Headquarters<p><p>

1100hrs

Warrant Officer Webber gently set his Pelican dropship down in the LZ. Swarms of civilians line the clearing. ODSs were forcing them back, their guns at the ready.

He switched the controls to his co-pilot and climbed out of his seat. He stretched momentarily before he walked out. Wounded were carried on and strapped in place. A Marine was standing on a Warthog holding a loudspeaker.

"You will all get your turn," he was saying. "Our wounded are our first priority."

Another pilot came over to Webber.

"Is the Remington, going to fit all these civilians?" Webber asked.

The pilot shook his head.

"We're not evacuating them," the pilot told him. "They're just telling them that so they calm down."

A civilian broke through the line of Marine sprinting for the dropship. The Marine atop the Warthog turned, unholstering his pistol and fired. The civilian collapsed to the ground. Everything got real quite.

"I said you will get your turn, now everyone calm down and make room," the Marine told the crowd. "Or else you're gonna see more of this."

The crowd slowly backed up and remained quite.

"We got Banshees incoming," someone screamed, just as an air raid siren broke the silence.

Webber turned and ran back to his Pelican, his co-pilot already firing the engines. The civilians in front of him were panicking, some running for the Pelicans, the Marines running for cover. A squadron of Banshees screamed past, firing their fuel rod and plasma cannons. The rounds striking groups of civilians.



Webber gripped his seat as his co-pilot climbed the Pelican into the air, gaining altitude. Webber transferred the controls and rocketed away from the LZ.

"Shit, we got a Banshee behind us," his crew chief called out.

Webber nosed down, going nap-of-the-earth, trying to shake the alien fighter.

"Any UNSC forces this is Omega 19-41, we have a Banshee engaging us and we need support," Webber announced over the radio.

"Omega," a voice replied. "This is Foxtrot Gamma 1, I am inbound."

Webber dodged left, then right, plasma streaking by. The dropship shook violently.

"We're hit," his co-pilot announced.

"Foxtrot Gamma 1, we're not going to last much longer, where the hell are you."

"I got a visual on you, hang in there," the fighter jockey replied. "I'm coming in from your 7 o'clock. Think you can bank to your right?"

Webber banked sharply to his right, the dropship still skimming the treetops.

"I've got tone, engaging."

He couldn't see anything but a Skyhawk suddenly dropped down in front of him.

"Your clear Omega, glad to help," the voice told him.

"Thanks for the support."

Webber climbed sharply, heading for the Remington.

## 6. Chapter 6: Havana Part 2

Near Havana Gorge

1132hrs

"We lost contact with them shortly after they destroyed the excavation site," Gunnery Sergeant Sykes told them over the roar of the engines. "They ambushed a Covenant squad but reinforcements came. They are knee-deep in it and need help, fast."

Cussler sat inside the Pelican dropship. His platoon, now numbering twenty-two were in route to extract the Reconnaissance men. The three Pelican flight dropped down into the gorge.

The plan was for two Pelicans carrying ODST to drop in and unload

their troops at a LZ near the pinned Recon men and then provide cover. Two squads would hold the LZ, while three others would breakthrough to the Recon squad. They would move back to the LZ and both units would extract.

"Get ready, 2 minutes out," the crew chief yelled.

"Fourth and Fifth squads will hold the LZ," Sykes ordered. He replaced his helmet and moved to the door, jacking a shell into his M90.

The Pelican dropped lower, the other two following suit.

"The LZ is hot, you'll be jumping," the crew chief announced. "We won't touch down."

The dropship rocketed over a field of high grass. Plasma streaked past the open cargo door. He felt the Pelican flare and slow to a stop.

"Go, go, go."

Sykes was gone in a flash. Everyone quickly followed. It was John's turn and he jumped out. It felt like he was in the air for minutes, exposed for everyone to shoot at. Then he hit the ground. He rolled, in pain, out of the way of the last few coming down. It was at least a ten-foot fall.

He jumped up and attempted to run for the cover of the woods. Plasma sizzled past and he dropped down. He popped his head up, he made it about ten feet.

"Covenant in the tree line," someone shouted.

Cussler raised his battle rifle to shoot, but didn't know what was in front of him. Bullets whizzed past, shredding the grass.

"Hold your fire," Cussler shouted. The shooting stopped.

Plasma streaked overhead, burning the grass, small fires erupting.

"Form a perimeter," someone yelled.

"I don't know where the hell you are," a voice replied.

"Come to my voice."

Green smoke rose up behind him, bellowing into the air from atop a small knoll.

"Rally by the smoke."

Cussler turned and crawled towards the smoke. Smoke from the fires mixed with that from the grenade and covered the area.

"Coming in," he shouted as he near the green smoke.

He quickly crawled into the perimeter. The grass was flattened in a decent sized circle. Marines were flat on their stomachs, facing

outward. Sykes was crouched in the center of the perimeter, using the radio.

Cussler found an empty spot and dropped in. A Pelican swooped in, firing it 70mm chainguns.

"They'll clear the tree line for us," Sykes told them.

There was a small explosion in front of John. Flames shot up, smoke rising above the grass. There were more explosions and more fire erupted.

"The sons-a-bitches are throwing flame grenades," someone cried.

"Everybody, get to the tree line, quickly," Sykes ordered.

John jumped up and sprinted for the shelter of the trees. Fires were spreading throughout the grass. Black smoke hovered around them. Plasma continued to sizzle past. A Pelican dropped in again, chewing up the ground in front of them, trying to suppress the plasma fire. Cussler kept running. He spotted movement in the trees. He fired his BR from the hip, not wanting to stop. He reached the tree line, pressing himself against a tree, he fired at the retreating Covenant.

"Hold your fire," a voice cried, "Marine coming in."

A Recon man jumped up from behind a tree and sprinted towards them. His helmet was gone and he was breathing hard. A large gray spike was impaled in his arm, it was at least eight inches long.

"Where's the rest of your squad?" Sykes asked.

"Dead Gunny," the Recon man replied.

"How, they were doing fine when we got the call?"

"There were these guerilla looking things that attacked us. They had grenade launchers and these spike guns," the man replied, pointing to his arm. "They charged our position. I got hit and played dead."

Sykes paused for a moment, looking around.

"Get us out of here," he told the Pelican pilots.

The Pelicans quickly came down in the high grass. The platoon hustled for the dropships and piled in. The dropship rose into the air as something stepped out into the LZ. It fired something at the fleeing Pelicans. Several large spikes impaled themselves in the dropship.

Cussler breathed a sigh of relief as the pilot kicked in the engines and the field slowly became smaller and smaller.

\* \* \*

>Division Headquarters <p>1243hrs<p>

Colonel Reynolds watched the Shortswords make bombing runs on Havana. They were flattening everything around the two cut off battalions.

"Colonel?"

Reynolds turned, Nadal and Jones stood waiting.

"Yes?"

"Sir your orders?" Nadal asked.

"Colonel Jones your men are to attack and breakthrough to our trapped forces. Colonel Nadal, you're men in reserve. Bring up the rest of the armor. We'll drop the ODSTs in to help the trapped battalions."

Jones nodded and walked off, heading for his Warthog.

"Nadal, contact the Remington, have orbital strikes ready. We'll use brute force to break through."

"And after we reach our men?" Nadal asked.

"We pull out of the city and hold on."

\* \* \*

>ODST Staging Area <p>1258hrs<p>

"Same plan as before," their new battalion commander, Captain Dietz told them. "We'll be coming in low in fast over the city and reinforce the besieged battalions. Insertion will be hairy. We'll be using troop pods to insert. One squad per pod. There's a lot of Covenant between us here and our objective and they'll love to shoot down a Pelican full of Marines."

Cussler quietly listened to Captain Dietz, they weren't going in with the enthusiasm they did last time. Excited, eager, gone now it was just a grim determination to get it over with.

"The fighting in the city is vicious. Close quarters and small unit actions. Marines holding one building, one block, while Covenant forces take another. There are small bands surrounded throughout this two square mile area," Dietz announced pointing to a map. "When reinforcements arrive, they will push out and expand the perimeter, hopefully rescuing all of those small groups."

"The attack is set to go off at 1500hrs. You'll have one hour and forty-five minutes, to rest, eat, shit, shave, gear up, or whatever the hell else you do behind closed doors," Dietz said. "Before we kick this off I want to wish you all good luck."

Dietz stepped off the Warthog he was standing in and walked away. The group of ODSTs slowly dispersed. Cussler climbed into a Warthog and pulled out a dehydrated ration, the add water and shake type.

"Son-of-a-bitch, pork chops and cornbread," Cussler made a face and threw the ration outta the Hog. He puled out another:

Spaghetti.

Dixon and Gierlowski joined him in the Warthog, breaking out their own rations.

"I heard that DiSopa was going to make it," Gierlowski announced.

That's good," Cussler replied

They finished eating in silence. Dixon quietly fell asleep, Gierlowski disassembled his battle rifle. Cussler also gradually drifted off, but was jolted out of a peaceful sleep by the call to "saddle up".

\* \* \*

>Havana Outskirts <p>1457hrs<p>

Corporal Clark adjusted the scope of his M99 sniper rifle, targeting a gold armored Elite. He would die first.

Clark and his spotter, Private Cain, were one of the two dozen sniper teams, deployed along a wooded ridge outside the city. They were to support the attack by killing anything that showed flesh.

Cain shifted nervously beside him, looking up from his spotter scope.

"Do you think our guys can pull this off?" Cain asked.

"Of course, they will," Clark replied not wanting to go there.

\* \* \*

>Sergeant Rivera stood up in the turret and leaned against the barrel of his MBT. Himself, like the rest of the assault force was impatiently waiting for the attack to go off. His gunner, Tony Wells was below, making final preparations. <p>They were under orders not to stop for anything. There was a mile of open ground to cross before they entered the city and they wanted to cover it fast. Unfortunately Marines were to orders to stay off the tanks, keeping fields of fire clear.<p>

He checked his watch, 2:58 and climbed back into the Scorpion as a fleet of Pelicans passed overhead.

\* \* \*

>Cussler tightly gripped the barrel of his BR-55, which leaned against his knee. This would be his third insertion, in as many days, into a hot LZ. So far they all went wrong. <p>"Once we hit the ground, immediately run for cover," Corporal Palmer was telling them. "Find a good spot and return fire."<p>

The pod shook as the dropship maneuvered. Drop pods were based off the HEVs, Titanium A armor, lead foil, and a ceramic skin. They were attached to the back of a Pelican and could carry a maximum of eight combat laden Marines. They were occasionally also used for resupply and shelter.

They sat in silence, each man praying that the drag chute and retrorockets would function properly.

"One minute out," Palmer announced. "Lock and load."

Cussler raked the charging handle and shouldered the battle rifle, bracing his knees against the side.

"You know, at another time I might be turned on," Dixon said, Cole was sitting across from him. Her legs spread as she braced herself. He received a swift kick in the chest for his comment.

The pod suddenly detached itself, only the heavy restraint kept Cussler in his seat. They could faintly hear explosions from below as they quickly descended to the ground. The drag chute deployed, slowing their decent. Finally the troop pod slammed into the ground.

"GO, GO, GO," Palmer shouted.

The six Marines quickly jumped out the hatch, sprinting for the nearest building. Plasma sizzled past. A Marine stood in the doorway, signaling for them to come in. He covered the ODSTs as they ran past him and dove inside.

\* \* \*

>Corporal Clark felt the M99 slam against his shoulder, the gold armored Elite flipping end over end. <p>"Down, Jackal, beam rifle, second story window, gray building on your right," Cain told him.<p>

Clark shifted and fired.

"Down, Wraith turret gunner, drop down."

Clark lowered the rifle, gently raising the stock and fired again.

The Marines began their attack; Scorpions rumbled out of the trees and thundered into the open. Hundreds of Marines followed, closing in behind the tanks, the ones in the middle spreading out. A wing of Skyhawks soared overhead, dropping phosphorus bombs just inside the city. The Rhino tanks fired a salvo as well, the 105mm HE rounds, flattening several small buildings. Two Seraphs dropped out of the clouds. They strafed the Marines with their plasma cannons. A Scorpion took multiple hits and exploded, its turret flying into the air. A squadron of Skyhawks came in behind them and chased them away. Another group rocketed past, moving to intercept a wing of Banshees. The squadron of Short Swords appeared and flattened the first rows of buildings.

\* \* \*

>Sergeant Rivera fired his 90mm cannon. A Covenant shade was dismounted, its gunner sent flying. His Marine turret gunner grunted and dropped into the tank, shot through the head. He spotted the source, a group of Jackals hidden in a collapsed section of a roof. <p>He traversed the barrel.<p>

"Give me a HEAT."

Tony Wells acknowledged the order.

Rivera fired the main cannon. The 90mm high explosive shell flattened the structure. He slammed down on the accelerator, closing the distance to the city limits. Numerous Wraiths lobbed mortars at them. Shades on roofs of buildings, rained plasma down upon them.

"All units listen up!" he called to his tank platoon. "One and Two concentrate fire on the Wraiths, three and Four, light up the shades."

"Load with Sabot Tony," he told his gunner.

They needed penetration now. He fired the main gun, the nearest Wraith bursting into blue flame.

"Keep em coming," he ordered.

He fired again, destroying another Wraith. He maneuvered the Scorpion through a small stream, the city just in front of him. Plasma scorched his armor. A mortar landed next to him, the ground shaking. Rivera fired again, another Wraith down.

He reached the city limits, the first few houses and other structures turned to debris from the airstrikes. The Scorpion easily climbed over the rubble. Artillery shells landed in front of him, slowly moving forward as he advanced, flattening houses and massacring Covenant forces. He silently thanked the forward observer and continued on.

\* \* \*

>"Corpsman!" <p>Petty Officer 2nd Class Ford heard the cries. He jumped up from the patient he was working on and sprinted forward. Plasma kicked up dirt around him and he weaved back and forth. He spotted a Marine waving to him.<p>

Ford slid in besides the Marine. His buddy was on the ground, clutching his chest, blood was coming out of his mouth.

"I got him," Ford told the healthy Marine. The Marine jumped back up only to be struck down. A purple beam hit him square in the head.

"Shit," Ford muttered and ducked down, with only a pistol for protection, he usually relied on other Marines for help. He checked the Marines' chest wound, it was sucking. Ford opened his bag and pulled out a roll of plastic wrap he carried for such an occasion. He placed it over the wound, using medical tape to hold it in place. It didn't work, it wasn't creating a vacuum.

Ford rolled the Marine over and discovered the problem, a large hole in his back. He didn't have any bandages big enough. He gave the wounded Marine some morphine and marked his location using his HUD.

He jumped up and continued on, crouched low.

"Corpsman!" a voice cried.

Ford hustled towards the voice, a mortar landing next to him and knocked him flat.

"Corpsman!"

He struggled back up and pressed on. He saw a Marine waving his battle rifle in the air and moved towards him. The Marine was hit in the arm but nodded to another Marine who was missing his right leg.

Ford motioned for the one Marine to stay and pulled a tourniquet from his bag. He slipped it around the wounded Marine's thigh and wrapped it tight. The Marine screamed out in pain, slamming his fist into the ground. Ford gave him a shot of morphine.

He turned to the other Marine. He had a simple wound. Ford pulled out a can of biofoam and stuck the tip into hole. He filled it up and slapped a dressing on tying it tight.

"You're good," he told the Marine, who nodded and chased after his comrades.

Ford marked the location of the patient and continued on as well, responding to the calls for a Corpsman.

\* \* \*

>Division Headquarters <p>1510hrs<p>

"Colonel," Nadal said coming over. "Our forces are inside the city, they took moderate casualties pushing in. Colonel Jones is down."

Reynolds nodded.

"Order your men in," Reynolds told him. "Keep pushing, send in the rest of the armor as well. Keep moving the airstrikes and artillery forward."

Nadal quickly left, shouting orders at his radioman.

There was a loud explosion, the ground shaking slightly, the Remington doing its part.

\* \* \*

>Eastern Havana <p>1520hrs<p>

Cussler ducked as spikes impaled themselves in the wall. He crouched next to the window and double-tapped the trigger, sending six 9.5 bullets ripping into the Brute. He pressed against the wall and a hail of plasma rounds scorched the window frame.

"John here," Dixon shouted and tossed him a M41 rocket launcher.

Cussler leaned out the window and fired both barrels, the first



rocket detonating amongst the rubble, sending two Brutes flying, and the other vaporizing a squad of Grunts. He handed the launched back for someone to reload and fired out the window.

Covenant ground forces were dug in on the other side of the street. They were hidden in rubble, collapsed section of structures, hand dug fighting positions and intact buildings. Paved streets could no longer be seen, dirt and debris now covered the streets. The fact that it just rained made everything a muddy mess.

A plasma grenade sailed through the window.  
> "Down," Cussler shouted.<p>

He flattened himself against the floor. The grenade detonated, not harming anyone. He jumped out and gunned down another Brute. A Skyhawk roared down the street, dropping phosphorous bombs on the opposite side. The Marines cheered as Covenant forces were caught in the deadly flames.

A hail of spikes broke through the chemicals and flew through the window. Elizabeth Taylor caught a needle in the abdomen, she bent over and collapsed to the ground. Dixon knelt next to her feeling for a pulse. He looked up and shook his head. Dixon and Gierlowski carried her out in the hall and came back in.

Another Skyhawk thundered past, dropping more bombs, but this time they didn't cheer.

\* \* \*

>Havana <p>1525hrs<p>

Sergeant Rivera flinched as spikes bounced off the armor plating. The damned things were at least eight inches long and they scared the shit out of him.

He fired a HEAT into a house, bringing half to crashing to the ground. The big engines roared as he gave it more gas to climb over the rubble.

"Ed," Wells called out. "The street ends, we'll have to go around."

"Like hell, give me a HEAT."

Tony Wells activated the automated arm, which feed a HEAT shell into the breech. Wells signaled that it was loaded.

Rivera fired the shell into a house blocking the way. He turned the turret around as he slammed down on the accelerator. The Scorpion plowed into the half-destroyed house and reemerged through the other side. The house collapsing behind them. Covenant forces in front of him panicked and began to retreat and the sight of the MBT.

"Load a beehive, quickly," Rivera ordered.

He fired the cannon, eight thousand razor sharp darts were hurled at the fleeing Covenant. Bodies were shredded and turned into a bloody pulp.

Another Scorpion to their left took a direct hit from a mortar, there were numerous secondary explosions as the ammunition began to cook off. Marines climbed through the rubble behind them and pressed forward.

\* \* \*

>Clark dropped down behind a slab of concrete, Cain joining him. The Brute position had them pinned. He tried to get a shot, but half a dozen spikes whizzed past, making him duck back down. <p>"I got a launcher, cover me," A Marine announced. He jumped up and aimed at the Brutes. A hail of spikes pinned stabbed him in the chest and pinned him against a wall. Another impaled itself in the Marine's head. He didn't even have time to cry out.<p>

"Shit," one Marine muttered.

Clark motioned for the Marine's leader, a corporal, to come over.

"I'll try and flank them," Clark told him, "I'll see if I can get around these buildings."

The fire team leader nodded and motioned for his men to lay down suppressive fire.

Clark jumped and sprinted across the street, his M99 pressed against his chest. Dirt flew around him as spikes impaled themselves in the dirt. He ducked into an alley, sprinting down the dark passage.

He climbed over a short wall, ducking down behind a dumpster as a squad of Jackals passed. Clark continued forward, entering another alley. Ahead of him he could see the Brutes entrenched in a shell crater. Four Brutes and a plasma turret.

He leaned against the corner of a building, pressing the barrel against the corner. He placed the crosshairs on the Brute manning the turret. He steadied himself and fired. The 14.5mm bullet stuck the Brute in the head. He switched targets and fired again.

The remaining two Brutes charged into the alley dropping behind cover.

"Fuck," Clark growled.

He swept back and forth, looking for any sign of them. One Brute jumped up and sprayed his position with spikes. Clark dropped down, bits of concrete bouncing off his helmet. He leaned around and shot the Brute in the chest, the Brute keeling over. Clark fired again, send the Brute somersaulting onto his stomach. The other Brute roared and charged towards Clark.

He panicked and pulled the trigger hearing a click.

"Shit," Clark dropped the rifle and struggled unholster his pistol.

The Brute smacked him in the chest, throwing him against a wall. He raised its fists, preparing to slam them down on Clark's head. There were several bursts of gunfire, dark blue blood spraying over Clark.

The Brute roared out in pain and collapsed to the side. A Marine fire team stepped into the alley, the squad leader, putting a final burst into the Brute's head.

He gave Clark a hand and helped him up.

"Thanks," the Marine told him. "You alright?"

Clark nodded as a Skyhawk roared overhead.

\* \* \*

>Lieutenant Birney dropped in low over the city and fired his 50mm cannons. Geysers of dirt kicked up below, as the heavy rounds slammed into the ground. He swung around and made another pass, chewing up Covenant ground forces. <p>Marines were now pouring into the city, but were meeting stiff resistance. The Skyhawk and Shortswords made numerous bombing runs since the attack began and were beginning to run low on ordinance. Smith called out a grid number, saying Marines needed support in that area. Birney banked left and headed for the coordinates, displaying on the computer in the cockpit.<p>

An alarm suddenly went off inside the cockpit.

"Shit, incoming!" Smith cried. "Hard right!"

Birney jerked the stick to the right and pulled up. A plasma torpedo glided past.

"Seraph, 5 o'clock low."

He rolled the Skyhawk and nosed down. The Seraph soared accelerated and sped off. Birney leveled the Skyhawk, debating whether to pursue the Covenant fighter.

"Banshees coming in 2 o'clock high," Smith announced. "There's a shit load of them."

Birney glanced to his right, he could see the enemy aircraft in the distance, dropping out of the clouds, heading right for them. He dropped down to the deck flying low and fast.

"This is Foxtrot Gamma 1," Birney called out on the radio. "Any UNSC fighters I need support. I have a large flight of Banshees incoming. I repeat a large flight of Banshees is heading towards me and need support."

The Banshees passed overhead. They weren't heading for him. They were going for the troops on the ground. Birney swung around and kicked in his afterburners.

"What are you doing?" Smith asked. "There's gotta be at least fifteen of them."

"They're going for the Marines," Birney replied. "We gotta do something."

He closed the distance between them, the Banshees still unaware of his presence.

"Got tone!" Smith announced. "Fox two!"

The Sidekick missile hit dead on, vaporizing the Banshee's cockpit. Smith launched a second missile bringing down another alien fighter. The Banshees formation broke apart and they scattered in every direction.

Birney soared through the disintegrating formation, firing his 50mm cannons crippling another fighter. He sharply swung around and came up behind another.

"Fox two!"

Another Banshees took a direct hit and spiraled to the ground.

"We got two dropping in behind us!" Smith cried.

He felt the Skyhawk shudder as it took multiple hits. He pulled up sharply and banked left, trying to shake them. One Banshee couldn't duplicate the maneuver and screamed past. Birney pulled up and came in behind the Banshee. He fired the 50mm cannons, sending the Banshee crashing into the ground.

"Foxtrot Gamma 1," a voice called out over the radio. "Support is inbound, ETA 1 minute. Hang on."

The Skyhawk violently shook as it took another hit.

"We lost our number two engine," Smith announced. "Number one is damaged."

Birney cursed silently. He banked sharply, kicking in the air brake and pulled up. The Banshee pilot didn't fall for it. Birney put the throttle to the max and gained altitude.

The Seraph flashed in front of him, coming to finish him off.

"Fuck," Birney muttered.

The Covenant Seraph dropped in behind them.

"It's got a lock on us," Smith announced, panic in his voice.

The alien fighter fired its pulse lasers. The Skyhawk took a direct hit. Birney lost control and the aircraft nosed down, spiraling out of control. A Banshee strafed the crippled fighter, plasma smashed through the canopy, destroying equipment.

"I can't hold her," Birney muttered, struggling to regain control. The ground was rapidly approaching.

"Eject!" he cried.

He got no answer. He looked over his shoulder and saw Smith slumped over, blood coming from a wound in his chest.

"Smith!" Birney called out. No reply

He cursed and pulled on the ejection lever. The canopy flew off and

Birney was propelled from the cockpit. He was detached from the seat and experienced a moment of free fall before his parachute deployed.

The crippled Skyhawk roared past, its engines on fire, and trailing smoke. He watched it until it crashed into the ground.

Birney struggled to steer away from the city but to no avail. He landed in a courtyard, quickly rolling up the chute. He pulled out his M6 pistol and checked around. It was clear for the moment.

"Hey you!" a voice called out.

Birney swiveled around pointing his pistol at a doorway.

"Hold fire and come here quickly," the voice commanded. "I'm a friendly."

Birney slowly moved to the door an arm reached out and hauled him inside. He struggled to free himself.

"Relax," a man told him turning on a flashlight. "I'm Lieutenant Garcia."

\* \* \*

>ODST Stronghold <p>1621hrs<p>

"I'm telling you I just saw a chute," Dixon announced.

Palmer gazed at the area Dix was pointing to. He shook his head turning back.

"Alright Cussler and you check it out," Palmer ordered.

Cussler sighed and followed Dixon as they sprinted down the steps and out of the house, running down the street.

"Are you sure about this?" Cussler asked.

"Positive."

He followed Dixon as they turned on another street. A Skyhawk roared overhead, circling the area.

"Ground troops this is FG-5," a voice said over the radio. "Do you copy?"

They paused and dropped down behind cover, a stray round striking a rock nearby.

"Roger this is Delta 1-1," Cussler replied.

"Are you trying to get to our downed pilot?"

"Affirmative."

Dixon fired a burst down the street. A Brute ducked behind a wall.

"He landed two hundred meters down the street to on your left," the Skyhawk pilot told them. "When you find him there's a nice sized courtyard to your east. Move to there to extract."

"Two hundred meters on the left," Cussler repeated to Dixon.

They jumped up and continued on, Cussler leading the way. The Brute popped out from cover, they both fired, dropping it. They moved down the side of the street, spikes and plasma striking around them. The Skyhawk strafed a Covenant position in front of them.

He ducked into a courtyard Dixon following, a plasma grenade detonating behind them. John noticed a parachute tucked into a corner, roughly hidden under some rocks. There was no sign of the pilot.

"FG-5 this is Delta 1-1," Cussler told the Skyhawk pilot. "We've got no sign of him, sorry."

"Roger that Delta," the pilot replied. "Your way out looks clear. Thanks"

They left the courtyard and ran back up the street.

"Shit get down," Cussler shouted.

A squad of Brutes appeared around the corner, two were heavily armored. Cussler stuck his head up over a pile of debris in front of them. The Brutes spotted him and fired.

"Shit!"

They quickly returned fire, dropping one of the beasts. A grenade detonated in front of them, closely followed by another.

A Brute charged their position roaring as it raised a grenade launcher, the large bayonet attached to it clearly visible.

They both opened fire, the Brute jerking as it took a full mag from both of them and fell back. One Brute raised a hammer looking weapon and rushed towards them.

It swung the hammer, a blast of air propelling Cussler backwards, slamming into a pile of debris, the impact making his vision blur. The beast walked up to Dixon who was struggling to stand and swung it again throwing Dixon into a wall. The Brute looked at Cussler as his vision faded.

\* \* \*

>Thank you for reading so far. Please read and review.<p><p>

## 7. Chapter 7: The Last Full Measure

**\*\*The Last Full Measure\*\***

**\*\*Day 4\*\***

Division Headquarters

Eastern Havana

0100hrs

Colonel Reynolds stepped into his headquarters. The house looked dark from the outside, but blackout blinds had been put up in front of the windows so no Covenant forces could spot them from the air. Colonel Nadal and Lieutenant Colonel Maxis, Colonel Jones replacement, stood around a table, staring at a map. Upon his approach they looked up and stiffened.

"Gentlemen, what happened?"

"Covenant forces counter-attacked," Nadal announced pointing to the map. "They hit our cut off boys and halted our attack force. The attack stalled and now both sides are digging in."

Reynolds nodded staring at the map, his hand slowly clenching into a fist. They were almost out of ordnance for the Short Swords. They were running out of fuel for the Skyhawks. The situation was going from bad to worse.

"Attack at dawn, 0530hrs," Reynolds ordered. "We need to breakthrough or break off. We cannot keep this up. We are running low of fuel and ammo. Either we achieve or come close to achieving a breakthrough."

"And what of the our cut off forces?" Maxis asked.

"We'll need to worry about those we can save," Reynolds replied grimly.

"Also we lost contact with the Remington," Nadal told him.

"What was the last contact we had with them?"

"That they were getting set to jump," Nadal replied. "It doesn't mean anything sir, Covenant aircraft may have damaged our comms."

He rubbed his temples and sat down in a chair, thinking about how many more would die in a few hours.

\* \* \*

>Eastern Havana<p><p>

0530hrs

"Come on Marines!" Captain Eric Bundy shouted to his company, waving his arm forward. He climbed up and over the barricade they constructed during the night. His men let out a cry and followed.

Plasma and spikes sizzled past as they charged through the rubble. A group of Brutes stepped out in front of them. Marines quickly gunned them down. They charged up the street, some branching off to clear the Covenant out of buildings.

A Banshee screamed overhead, firing its plasma cannons at them. A

second followed, it fired its fuel rod cannon. The green orb striking a group of Marines, vaporizing them. A Scorpion rumbled past, a hail of plasma fire striking it. The MBT fired its 90mm cannon, sending a Ghost flipping end over end.

He sprinted up the mud-covered street, gunning down a Grunt who was madly firing his needler. A Marine took the brunt of the pink needles, his chest exploding into a red mist. Another was decapitated by an Elite who was wielding an energy sword.

Bundy sprayed the Elite with bullets, its shields dying. The final two bursts punching holes in the alien's chest. The Scorpion in front of him took a blast from a Wraith, its turret flying into the air.

Two Warthogs raced passed one with a Gauss cannon attached. The gunner kept up his fire until a barrage of plasma fire stuck him down. The Warthog crashed into a pile of debris flipping over. The second one tried to turn around but a spike decapitated the driver. The passenger and gunner, still fighting until they to were killed.

Eric shouted to his men and kept going, killing a Jackal carrying a beam rifle. There was a small hill in front of him. He could see Covenant forces dug in atop it. He pressed up against a slab of concrete, several men joining him.

One Marine tried to get across the road but was gunned down. A Corpsman attempted to rescue him but was also killed. Bundy fired a quick burst at the entrench aliens and waited for armor.

\* \* \*

>Sergeant Rivera saw the Marine waving at him, pointing to a small hill. Covenant were atop it, pouring fire down onto the Marines. He moved the MBT forward, shouting for a beehive.<p><p>

Rivera maneuvered around the slab of concrete and started up the hill. He stopped midway and fired, the razor sharp darts shredding the aliens. He slammed down on the accelerator and thundered up the hill. The tank climbed over the fortifications with ease. Marines charged past him, one waving his thanks.

"Give me a HEAT," Rivera ordered.

He traversed the turret towards a half-damaged building, snipers firing from inside. He fired the 90mm. The high explosive shell destroyed half the structure. He stood up, grabbing the M247. He raked a fresh round into the chamber and began to fire, gunning down Covenant ground troops as plasma and spikes impacted around him. Rivera kept shooting until a spike impaled itself in his skull.

\* \* \*

>Corporal Clark raced up the steps of the five-story building, taking them two at a time, his M99 over his shoulder. He reached the top where Cain was waiting, crouched down by a window.<p><p>

"Perfect spot," Cain told him.



Clark quickly flipped the bipod down and set the gun up on the windowsill and fumbled with the sights.

"Target downrange hundred meters," Call called out. "Brute with hammer."

Clark found the target and fired, blowing the Brute's brains out the backside of its head.

"Down. Another to its left."

Clark shifted targets and fired again.

"Down. Ghost gunner. Ten meters left."

He spotted the Ghost through the scope, its twin plasma cannons rapidly firing at the approaching Marines. He gently squeezed the trigger, the Elite piloting it flipped end over end.

Cain suddenly grunted and fell back, managing to cry, "Sniper!"

Clark quickly ducked down, as a purple beam flashed through the air where he'd been standing. He crawled to where Cain was clutching his chest, a neat hole drilled right through.

"I need a Corpsman at my position," Clark called out over the radio.

He reached for his med kit strapped to his back but found it was gone. He silently cursed and looked for something to use for a bandage. A medic burst through the open door, quickly coming over to Cain.

"Get down," Clark shouted to him.

The medic hesitated and a purple beam struck his head. The corpsman didn't even cry out, he just silently crumbled to the ground.

"Jesus Christ," Clark muttered and crawled to the medic's dead body. He grabbed the bag off him and moved back to Cain. He pulled out a bandage and slapped it on his back. He then grabbed a can of biofoam and injected it into the wound. He placed another bandage over the entrance wound.

"Can you make it downstairs?" Clark asked.

Cain nodded, his jaw clenched tightly shut.

He grabbed his sniper and followed Cain down the stairs branching off as they reached the third floor. He got down and crawled towards the nearest window, gently resting his barrel on the sill, trying not to make sudden movement.

Clark spotted the Jackal sniper, crouched in the rubble of a destroyed house. He placed the crosshair over the Jackal's head and fired. The Jackal flipped onto its stomach, the beam rifle going off, the round going wild. He nodded in satisfaction and searched for more targets.

\* \* \*

>Private First Class McKenzie climbed up the small hill and over the Covenant fortifications. He passed a Scorpion tank, its driver, slumped over his M247. The gunner was out of the tank, crouched next to a tread firing a M6 Carbine.<p><p>

A Banshee passed overhead, firing its plasma cannons. His squad leader cried out and collapsed to the ground. They pressed forward, firing rockets and grenade into every window. A plasma turret, entrenched in some rubble began to fire on them.

McKenzie quickly ducked down in a shell hole. His squad leader crawled up to him, wielding a rocket launcher. He stood up and took aim. The turret gunner spotted him and cut him down. The Marine didn't even cry out. The launcher landed next to McKenzie.

He quickly grabbed the launcher as another sting of plasma scorched the area around him. He quickly poked around the corner and fired. The rocket went wild, impacting a building next to the turret. He leaned out from the opposite side and took more careful aim. The turret gunner saw him, but McKenzie fired first. The 102mm rocket sent debris flying, completely destroying the turret.

His fire team leader smacked him on the back and continued forward.

\* \* \*

>Gunnery Sergeant Quinn pumped another shell into his M90. A Brute jumped out in front of him, raising its grenade launcher, exposing the large bayonet. Quinn raised his shotgun and fired. The heavy 8 gauge buckshot ripping into the Brute. He pumped and fired again.<p><p>

"Only a bit farther," Quinn shouted to his men.

There started to be less and less intact buildings and structures. The Covenant also started fighting harder and harder, showing less willingness to fallback to another position.

Quinn jumped down into a roughly constructed slit trench, a M247 gunner joining him, setting up his turret. A roar suddenly erupted from Covenant lines. Covenant forces exploded from their cover, charging forward. Several Wraiths and Ghosts joined them.

"They're counter-attacking!" Quinn cried. "Hold your positions."

The MG gunner next to him, poured fire into the attackers. More Marines jumped down into the trench. Quinn looked behind them, hoping to see Scorpions coming to the rescue. There wasn't any.

Quinn fired a shell into a Grunt trying to lob a grenade into the trench. A Marine with a rocket launcher jumped in. Quinn told him to go for the tanks. He moved down the trench, shouting for everyone to aim for the Brutes. A Marine in front of him went down, several spikes sticking out of his chest. Quinn picked up the man's Br-55 and returned fire, dropping a Brute. The Wraiths fire their cannons. Mortars landing around them, Marines crying out. Ghosts raced past, some jumping right over the trench.

"We're gonna be overrun!" someone cried.

"No, we hold the line here," Quinn shouted.

\* \* \*

>In Orbit over Nyko<p><p>

0703hrs

Captain Doherty stepped onto the bridge of his destroyer. He had just come from the hanger bays, all of them packed with wounded. He didn't have enough medical personnel aboard.

"Rio, how much longer?" Doherty asked.

"Sir, last dropship just docked," the Ops officer replied. "ETA about 5 minutes."

Doherty nodded, sitting in his command chair. He leaned back, closing his eyes for a moment.

"Captain, Slipspace rupture!" Rio called out.

Doherty suddenly sat upright.

"Where?"

"Other side of the planet."

"Stenson deploy a Charion drone and ready the MAC cannons," Doherty ordered.

"Aye sir."

Doherty felt his stomach knot, his hand slowly forming a fist. The last thing he need now was another space fight.

Four Covenant ships, two Frigates and two Destroyers, appeared on a small screen. They just as quickly disappeared.

"Sir, rupture in-," Rio began.

The four alien vessels reappeared in front of them.

"Evasive maneuvers!" Doherty ordered. "Fire MAC cannons."

Lieutenant Stenson quickly fired as the Remington nosed down and increased speed, passing below the Covenant ships.

The closest ship took the first MAC round in the bow, punching a hole in the ship's hull. The second round bounced harmlessly off its shield.

"What the hell?" Doherty muttered.

The four ships lurched to life, slowly moving apart, their plasma turrets glowing.

"Ready the cannon, target the damaged ship."

"Aye Captain," Stenson replied.

The ships were spreading out, almost surrounding him. Once they fired, he wouldn't stand a chance.

"MAC cannons fully charged," Stenson announced.

"Fire."

Twin streaks of light sped to the Covenant Frigate. The first knocking down its shields, the second punching into the ships hull. The alien ship lost power and began to drift, dead in space.

"Captain, more Slipspace ruptures, same location," Rio called out.

"They mean business this time," Doherty said to himself.

The nearest Covenant Destroyer fired. An orb of red plasma began towards them.

"Bedlow hard to port!"

Doherty felt the Remington change course, the plasma still chasing them, closing in.

"Plasma Impact in 5 seconds 4 seconds 3 seconds 2 seconds 1"

The Remington shook violently, throwing Doherty into a bulkhead.

"Damage report," he said, tasting blood.

"Hull breach on upper decks, sealing those sections," Rio replied.

Doherty struggled to his feet, watching the view screens. The Covenant ships had almost encircled him, their plasma turrets glowing.

"Sir, incoming transmission." Rio announced, a surprised look on his face.

He nodded for Rio to patch it through.

"UNSC \_Remington\_, " a scratchy voice said. "This is the cruiser \_Fire of Liberation\_. We heard there was a fight on."

\* \* \*

>Eastern Havana<p><p>

0745hrs

Quinn ducked down as plasma scorched the top of the trench. He could hear the humming of the approaching Wraith. He popped up and gunned down a Brute.

The Wraith closed in on them, Quinn could see the mortar cannon lowering. The alien tank suddenly exploded, sending debris raining down on top of them. Quinn looked around for the cause.

A squadron of Longswords roared overhead. Several more followed, strafing the attacking Covenant. A fleet of Pelicans followed, firing their 70mm chin cannons. One lowered down in the street, a M247 in the cargo area, sending a hail of lead into the now retreating Covenant. The dropship landed, Marines pouring out.

Those around Quinn began to cheer, waving their rifles in the air. More dropships roared overhead, carrying Scorpions and Warthogs.

\* \* \*

>"Colonel!" his aide cried bursting inside the house. "You gotta see this."<p><p>

Reynolds stood up and followed his aide outside, who was pointing above the city. A massive ship was hovering over the city, a UNSC ship. Dozens of Longswords and Pelicans filled the airspace.

## 8. Chapter 8: Going Home

**\*\*Going Home\*\***

**\*\*Day 5\*\***

Planet Nyko

1021hrs

Lieutenant Garcia heard the distinct roar of a Pelican dropship. He quickly jumped up from behind his roughly built shelter and sprinted into the open. He fumbled for the signal flare in his pocket.

Lieutenant Birney joined him as they were enveloped in green smoke. The rest of the group cautiously made their way out, nervously looking around.

The Pelican circled them twice before it slowly descended, gently setting down, a fire team of Marines jumping out, forming a perimeter. Garcia ran over to them, their leader coming up.

"And who might you be?" the corporal asked.

"Lieutenant Garcia, 82nd of the 147th," he replied. "This is Lieutenant Birney, a pilot that was shot down."

"Well sirs," the Corporal told them. "Lets get you all onboard and checked out over at division."

Garcia waited for Birney and the rest of the civilians to climb onboard, the crew chief telling them to strap in. He found a seat, when he noticed Charlie staring at him. Garcia was stunned when the civilian smiled and nodded to the Marine.

\* \* \*

>Captain Eric Bundy slowly stepped through his company's aid station. His company suffered 44 dead and 68 wounded out of the 150 that were present for roll call just five days earlier. <p>He felt his heart break as he moved down the rows of his wounded. Some crying out, others semi-conscious from painkillers, a few managed to prop themselves up on their elbows as he passed, offering a weak salute. Bundy returned all of them, stopping every now and then to talk to one of them.<p>

Bundy stayed in the aid station well into the night until the last of his Marines were evacuated.

\* \* \*

>Corporal Clark leaned against the burned out hull of a Scorpion tank, staring ahead and yet not seeing anything, his M99 resting aside of him. <p>A corpsman walked up to him asking if he was all right. Clark just nodded, still looking straight ahead. He received word, less than an hour ago that his spotter Jimmy Cain was dead. They had graduated high school, basic, and sniper school together and were close. Jimmy even dated his sister and discussed the possibility of marriage several times.<p>

Clark closed his eyes, feeling tears welling up. The medic nodded, understanding the situation. He flagged down a passing Warthog, telling Clark to climb in. He soberly nodded and climbed in the back, still staring ahead.

\* \* \*

>"Get that Warthog over here, I got a live one!" <p>He felt himself being lifted up, gently being placed on something hard. The ground moving beneath him, a rough ride.<p>

Private First Class John Cussler slowly opened his eyes, seeing the blue sky dotted with puffy white clouds. A dirty face interrupted his view.

"Oh thank god," the voice said. "We thought you were in a coma."

John tried to pick himself up but a strong hand kept him down, telling him to rest. He stared at the sky until he passed out.

\* \* \*

>Colonel Reynolds stood motionless, watching the wounded being transported to the waiting ships.<p><p>

Admiral Hood came personally aboard the Fire of Liberation and brought with him ten ships and thousands of Marines. The destroyer Cronus made fame for itself when it charged into the group of Covenant ships. The destroyer took five plasma hits, but destroyed the four alien ships, saving the Remington. Once the space around Nyko was cleared, numerous passenger ships arrived to evacuate the remaining civilians.

"Colonel?" Reynolds turned, he saw his aide, Lieutenant Benjamin,

holding a sheet of paper. "I have the final numbers."

He accepted the sheet, taking a breath before reading it: 4,358 dead, 8,713 wounded, a total of 13,071 casualties. 42 out of 80 Pelicans destroyed, 7 out of the 10 Skyhawks destroyed, 68 out of 115 Warthogs destroyed, 23 out of 40 Scorpions destroyed. Covenant losses are unknown but estimated to be 25,000 or higher, including the loss of 5 frigates, 2 destroyers, and 1 cruiser. Civilian losses are estimated to be 3.5 million or higher.

Reynolds pocketed the paper. It would be considered a victory, a true hero's tale. 20,000 Marines, alone and abandoned by their superiors fight to survive, in the face of the enemy until help finally comes. He sighed and turned to face the city, once alive and beautiful. Now a smoking ruin.

\* \* \*

>John woke several hours later, in the hangar bay of a UNSC ship. Tim Gierlowski was sitting next to him and smiled when he saw him awake.  
<p>"How ya feeling?" Tim asked.<p>

"Like I have the worlds worst hangover," Cussler replied giving a weak grin.

Tim's smiled vanished.

"Wanna know how bad?"

Cussler nodded

"Taylor and Palmer didn't make it. Alyssa is ok. Dixon is beat up pretty bad but should survive."

Cussler nodded again.

"At least its over," Gierlowski offered.

"Ya, for now."

\* \* \*

>Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I'd appreciate if you could give me a review if you already haven't. <div>

End  
file.